



# From Convent to Conflict

OR

## A NUN'S ACCOUNT OF THE INVASION OF BELGIUM

BY

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Province of Antwerp,  
Belgium*

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JOHN MURPHY COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

200 W LOMBARD ST.

BALTIMORE, MD

541  
M35

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JUL 15 1916



## Introduction

The publication of this little volume has for its object a better understanding of actual conditions, immediately following the invasion of a hostile army. The hope is indulged that the harrowing scenes witnessed by the author in Belgium, after the German invasion in 1914, may induce our own countrymen and women to more fully appreciate the blessings of peace. The events narrated are set forth as actually occurring, and—"with malice to none, with charity for all."

Any profits derived from its favorable reception by the reading public or the charitably inclined are to be devoted to the reconstruction and repair of our school and convent, damaged during the engagement at the Fortress of Willebroeck, or for the establishment of a sewing school, with a lace-making department, for young women in America or England, as our Reverend Superiors may decide.

Any assistance in this charitable work will be gratefully appreciated by the author and her scattered community in Belgium, England and Holland.

SISTER M. ANTONIA.

Skaneateles, New York,

April 3rd, 1916.

## Letter of Introduction

La Supérieure du Couvent des Filles de Marie a Willebroeck, Province d' Anvers, en Belgique déclare par la présente que ses soeurs Marie Antoine et Marie Cecile sont envoyées aux Etats Unis, a fin d' examiner s' il y aurait moyen d' y établir une colonie de Filles de Marie; elle donne a Soeur M. Antoine le Pouvoir d' agir en son nom afin de prendre les mesures nécessaires a cet effet.

SOEUR M. BERCHMANS.

Willebroeck, 29 September, 1914.

Approuvé:

D. J. CARD. MERCIER, Arch. de Malines

### TRANSLATION.

The Superior of the Convent of the Daughters of Mary, Willebroeck, Province of Antwerp, Belgium, state by this present (letter) that the Sisters Mary Antonia and Mary, Cecilia are sent to the United States in order to examine if there are means of

establishing a colony (mission) of the Daughters of Mary there; she gives to Sister M. Antonia the power to act in her name as to taking the measures necessary to this effect.

SISTER M. BERCHMANS.

Willebroeck, 29 September, 1914.

Approved:

D. J. CARD. MERCIER, Arch. de Malines.

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## CHAPTER I.

BOARDING SCHOOL IN THE COUVENT DES  
FILLES DE MARIE, WILLEBROECK,  
PROV. D' ANVERS, BELGIQUE,  
JULY, 1914.

A merry group of Convent girls, in charge of Sister guardian, was seated in the shade of a huge old pear tree, discussing the joys and expectations of the approaching summer vacation. High are the walls enclosing this ancient cloister, and many are the gay young hearts protected and developed within its shady precincts.

Bright are the faces and happy the hearts of more than one hundred young girls on this midsummer day in the memorable year 1914. They are now enjoying the morning air in the playground, having just returned from their usual walk in the garden. The weather is somewhat oppressive; but as time is precious in boarding school, every one

has something to do. One is crocheting; another is finishing a piece of Irish lace; still another is reviewing an article in a certain newspaper, as it is her task to make a summary for that evening's meeting of the Study Circle.

Joy, unalloyed by the experience of care or sorrow, is written on the face of every child. It is only one week before the annual distribution of prizes, the subsequent close of the school year, and a speedy family reunion.

It is eight o'clock. The sign is given, and instantly a hundred busy-bodies become still and serious. Not another word is spoken as the preceptress conducts the long line through the large playroom, over the small yard, and into the various classrooms.

The young ladies, aged from fifteen to twenty, proceed at once to the sewing department. This is to them the most important and interesting of all the rooms; needlework being a predominant feature in the education of all young Belgian women. After prayer, work begins. Some are cutting patterns; others are putting pretty lace



collars on those suits which must serve for the reception of diplomas; and a few of the more diligent, who have completed the term's work, are now finishing some lace or embroidery; while a cheery little canary is singing to the doubtful harmony of twenty sewing machines.

At the desk sits the patient and zealous teacher, Sister M. Alphonse, assisted in her work by two young novices. She is, perhaps, the most widely known and respected seamstress in all the province. For years her gold embroidery has sparkled on flags and banners; for years her skillful fingers have adorned the vestments that beautified God's altar in many churches of the diocese. Sister M. Alphonse knows the secret of winning the confidence of her pupils, and it is interesting to see how they crowd around her to reveal their little joys and sorrows and obtain advice in the various necessities of a long and busy school year.

On leaving the sewing-room, the visitor proceeds to the other departments. On all sides order and discipline prevail. The stone-floored halls are spotlessly clean.

Pretty mosaic figures attract the eye and give a quaint appearance to those ancient corridors. The walls are very high, the rooms spacious, the windows long and broad, thus capable of admitting an abundance of air, light and sunshine. The wooden floors of the classrooms are often scrubbed and strewn with fine white sand from the seashore.

Sad is the lot of any poor child who might have the misfortune to upset an inkstand. You would find her on her knees rubbing the stain with soap and scraping it with a piece of glass until every vestige of ink disappears. If you tell her to be more careful in future, she will laughingly reply: "Schuren is toch zoo aangenaam" (scrubbing is so pleasant).

In passing from one room to another, one notices the zeal and energy of both pupils and teachers. So busy are they, and so diligently are the hours employed, that the long school day, from eight o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening, fleets quickly away. The desks are stiff, and hard, and heavy; but no one complains. The young

Belgian women are devoted to their country and its customs; and if one were told that in another country more comfortable desks were provided, she would answer candidly, "Wij blijven liever in ons vaderland" (We would rather remain in our *own* country.)

The climate of Belgium is temperate, though more inclined to be cool than warm. The ground is very moist in some places. Never have we experienced the extremes of heat and cold found in America. Very heavy rains, accompanied by lightning and deafening peals of thunder, occur in the summer. There is little snow in the winter. In some parts of the country the grass is emerald green all year long. Rosebuds are seen on the bushes in January, and sometimes the trees are budding in February.

The stoves in Belgium are far inferior to those in America. Kitchen ranges are not used to bake bread. Those who do not possess stone or steam ovens, are obliged to buy bread daily at the baker's.

When accustomed to the cool, invigorating climate of Belgium, a great contrast is experienced in visiting America, and one,

day out, all year long, for a small compensation, insufficient for the comfort of their families.

As are the parents, so are the children; particularly in the boarding-school, where the rules and regulations necessitate strict discipline. Shortly before or after five o'clock in the morning, every child is up, unless some one is ill, who, for the time, is excused from rising. After dressing, a sign is given and all descend in strict silence to the chapel for morning prayer and the holy sacrifice of the Mass. After morning devotions they go to the refectory, where a bounteous supply of "botterham" (bread and butter) and strong coffee is served. Breakfast is eaten in silence, except on special festivals.

Needless to say that a great amount of tact is necessary on the part of the monitor to keep one hundred little tongues within their ivory walls until the signal is given to go to the playground.

Here we found them at the beginning of our narrative; here we shall find them again at half-past nine, at twelve, after four-o'clock lunch, and after supper; in the sum-

feels more or less in danger of suffocation during a journey in an overheated railroad car, or a few hours spent in the rooms of our American homes.

Most of the people in Belgium are early risers; and if, by chance, you happen to visit any of her cities at dawn of day, you will find her churches full to overflowing with zealous Christians, who, like their time-honored forefathers, offer the first fruits of the day to God, the giver of every good. The churches are numerous, large and beautiful, and multitudes of worshipers are in daily attendance. Men and women of the higher class attired in robes of broadcloth; poor peasant women, with little shawls or kerchiefs covering their heads and shoulders; blue-eyed, fair-faced children, and the aged; whose bent forms and tottering steps show that they are nearing the end of life's journey; all assemble in the early morning seeking mercy, peace and comfort at the Throne of Grace. We can imagine the effect of this morning's devotion, especially consoling to the poor, who, in their heavy "blokken" (wooden shoes) toil, day in and

mer evenings. In winter the time of recreation is spent in the reception hall of the boarding-school. At eight o'clock the school day ends, and all advance in strict silence to the dormitories to enjoy the peaceful slumber which health and youth affords.

The dormitories are four in number. Each child has a separate alcove. Several Sisters are in attendance during the night. In case of illness, a child is immediately removed to another apartment.

To these general rules and regulations there are exceptions on Sundays and special festivals during the year. On those days special devotional exercises take place in the morning, the afternoon being assigned to the practicing of hymns and sacred music. When the weather is fine, the recesses are longer, and pleasant walks may be enjoyed in the garden. One Sunday in the month, called "Visiting Day," is at the disposal of parents and visitors, who are permitted to call upon the children.

## CHAPTER II.

### DAILY SCHOOL LIFE.

Every Tuesday afternoon, from one until about four o'clock, all the boarders, except the little ones, dressed in full uniform, go forth for a long walk with their teachers. They usually visit churches, shrines, or places of particular interest, thus developing the spiritual, mental and physical powers of the body.

The uniform is quite becoming and attractive. It consists of a neat black dress, without showy trimmings or ornaments, black shoes and stockings, black hat, black silk gloves and necktie, with white sailor collar and cuffs. Sometimes white blouses, with straw hats, white silk neckties and gloves are worn. The hair is simply combed back, a part being taken up and fastened with a black or white bow, while the rest is braided and fastened again with a bow to match the necktie and gloves.

A silver chain, bearing the medal of the Immaculate Conception, is worn by all

those belonging to the "Congregation of the Children of Mary."

For what might seem monotonous in this manner of dress, we find sufficient variation in the blond locks, naturally curling around the forehead, the plump, rosy cheeks, the sparkling eyes and smiling faces of these gay and guileless children.

The uniform is not permitted to be of costly fabric, as it must be in accordance with the means of every pupil. It is the distinguishing mark of the institution to which the child belongs, and claims for her a certain respect not due to those dressed in gaudy, striking, many-colored garb, so often affected by girls and young ladies.

One of the principal and most beneficial results noticeable from the use of the uniform suit in the boarding-school is that it destroys the great inclination on the part of one pupil to surpass another in dress and personal adornment, thus preventing vanity and arrogance in the one, and removing the cause of envy, jealousy and distraction in the other.



What teacher has not remarked, in the ordinary classroom, the scornful glance on the face of a haughty child, as she regards her poorer neighbor's cheap dress, and who has not noticed the seeds of envy sprouting up in the heart of some poor little creature, so deeply wounded by the conduct of her affluent companion? There she sits, and, instead of diligently studying her lesson, that sensitive little soul is complaining against the All-Wise Providence, which has given to her neighbor more than to her. Alas! when that child returns home after school, poor mother must suffer. Her daughter begins to annoy and worry, tease and complain, until mother also feels the pangs of jealousy; and, falling into error, denies herself some household necessity in order to satisfy her discontented child. There are many mothers in the world at present who are real slaves to the caprices of their daughters in matters of dress. A pretty uniform in all common day schools would prevent a great deal of this annoyance to mothers, pupils and teachers.

Nearly every year since the opening of the sewing and household schools an exposition is held for about two weeks, in which all suits, lace, embroidery, painting, mending of clothing, and all other articles made by the boarders are exhibited.

Written invitations are sent out to the families and friends of the Sisters and children. Only those who have received such invitations are allowed to visit the exposition.

It sometimes occurs that a dramatic performance is given by the boarders as an entertainment, wherein the play represents an event of particular religious or historical interest. In this case, also, only those invited are permitted to be present.

Most interesting entertainments, provided by the Convent for the boarding-school, are the stereopticon views, with lectures given by the Reverend Professors of the College of Boom, in which are represented and discussed all the important scenes in and on the route to the Holy Land by those who have actually visited the scenes and secured the views themselves.

Another object of great interest is the "Play of the Birds," presented by a French Gentleman, when requested by the Superiors, for the pleasure and instruction of the pupils. There are several cages of birds of the smaller kinds. These birds are exactly trained, and, being perfectly obedient to their master, perform a series of exquisite feats, which leave a lasting impression on the memory. But the lesson which is intended to be impressed upon the minds of the pupils is the result which can be obtained from even the unreasoning creatures around us, by the unceasing, unwavering influence of a loving, gentle, patient and persevering character.

When the children had entered the classroom in the morning, the monitor stood for a moment and glanced around to see if the yard was in order. Her eye fell upon a paper forgotten by one of the pupils. She opened it and saw the portraits of the murdered Crown Prince and his noble consort, of Austria-Hungary, little recking the awful import of that heinous crime to her own fair country.

Was it the heat, or was it the harbinger of coming woe? A feeling of sadness so seldom experienced in the life of a zealous religious took possession of the Sister and carried her for the moment beyond her Convent walls, far away to the battlefield of life, where Pride, Ambition and Materialism, like unto monstrous autocrats, wage war against the human race. A moment she pauses while her heart exclaims, "Sursum Corda" (Lift up the hearts).

"One day in Thy house, O Lord, is better than thousands in the dwellings of sinners."

She glanced around the yard and went slowly to her room.

From the window could be seen the sunny, cloudless sky, the trees laden with ripening fruit, and far away those fertile, well-tilled fields in which, perhaps, there never had been raised before, a more plentiful or luxuriant crop of wheat and barley. Who could have ever thought that within a few short weeks that same, sunny sky would be raining death-dealing bombs upon the innocent inhabitants of a peace-loving nation, while her crops, over-ripe for the harvest,

were being trampled under foot and her plains and meadows deluged in a sea of blood?

How strange, how incomprehensible does it not appear to those whose lives are spent in the abode of sanctity, to witness this ignoble strife, this worship of mammon, the rise and fall of the victims of Ambition, along the path of glory leading to the grave? All the wealth of the world cannot obtain for them the precious pearl of peace, or the tranquillity of mind possessed by the poorest day laborer in the humble performance of his allotted task.

Peace is a hidden manna, unknown to the selfish lover of the world, in whose heart rages perpetual war.

On the outer page of a child's copy book, I observed an illustration which depicted in a very simple manner the progress of selfish Ambition as it is found today in every class of society. In the corner of the page sat a big black spider, intent on catching a little fly which had lit on a blade of grass. Just above was a greedy little bird, ready to grasp the spider. At a short distance a

vicious-looking old cat crouched in the grass, ready to spring at the bird. A dog, prowling along the street, seeing the cat, showed his long teeth and would have sprung at the cat, had not a little boy approached and begun to worry the dog. In the distance appears father, with the "rod of correction" in hand, ready to punish little Fritz for cruelty to animals.

Thus there is selfish strife in this world of ours, strife from the cradle to the grave; and no one, however proud, ambitious or arrogant he may be, who will not, one day, find a master greater than he. Now what is the object of this never-ending strife? It is simply an insatiable desire for superiority and self-satisfaction, even if, to obtain the ends in view, one must trample upon the rights of others.

Having lost original happiness in the fall of Adam, man has been looking for it ever since; but the great trouble is that many people look for it in the wrong direction, and seek it where no happiness is to be found. They think it consists in the acquisition of fame and glory, in the possession of

wealth, or in a life of ease and luxury; but these things are as transient as the evening twilight, and uncertain as the shadowy forms portrayed in the river's depths. The entire lives of many people are consumed in a fruitless search after the vain and perishable goods of the earth. Their years glide away like the sands in an hour-glass; and, finally they sicken, faint and fall, and their end resembles the pebbles thrown into the ocean, which for a moment ripple the surface and lose themselves in its waves. The human soul is as a fathomless sea, which nothing finite can satisfy. "O God!" cried St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are ever troubled, ever agitated, until they find rest in Thee."

## CHAPTER III.

THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL, CONVENT  
AND GARDEN.

The reverie into which the Sister had fallen was soon interrupted by the sound of children's voices in the small playground. Hastily leaving the room, she went to meet the merry little band of day-scholars who attend the boarding-school from half-past eight in the morning until six o'clock in the evening.

Joyfully the little group of twenty gathers around their mistress. One presents a flower which mother had given; another, a pretty postcard; yet another shows a toy or picture-book. A chubby little boy is crying because he has forgotten his new drum; and thus talking, laughing and crying, they are placed in line and lead away to the cozy little classroom whose long, broad windows look out upon the garden, which is ever green, and the rose bushes near the arbor, which bloom the greater part of the year,



and on whose twigs buds were often seen on New Year's Day.

During the morning session one rosy-cheeked little girl, with long yellow curls and an apron as white as snow, stood up by her desk and said, "Sister, there is war in the newspapers. Papa said so this morning." All the little heads turned, curious to hear about the war; and little Charlie took out his box of soldiers and arranged them in marching order on the desk. The mistress took advantage of the situation to teach the older pupils the great value of peace and the reward promised to the peacemakers "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

At half-past nine the recess bell rings, and all the pupils proceed once more to the playground and play tag, or continue their needlework in the shade of the wide-spreading trees. During certain seasons of the year all children play "beads," which is quite similar to a game of marbles. Happier than a general returning with the spoils of war is the child who, at the end of the season, can show her companions a string

of large, many-colored beads two or three yards long.

The swing and the rings are the source of great enjoyment for the children, and not a little care and anxiety to the Sister on guard, especially if the ripening fruit hangs on a branch within touching range of the children's feet.

When it freezes hard in the winter, there being no snow on the ground and no pond nearer than the large garden, a number of the older pupils pump water and throw it on the stone pavement of the playground, until the whole becomes as a sheet of glass; and then the exercise of skating on wooden shoes begins. Needless to say, there is danger of fracturing more than the pavement when this play begins.

Sister M. Anastatia has been for about twenty-eight years preceptress in the boarding-school. She is a small, slight figure, whose very presence has a kind of magic influence upon all around her. At her entrance and during her lessons perfect order prevails. Authority and precision, softened by great kindness of heart, are the distinc-

tive personal traits of Sister M. Anastatia. She is assisted in her work by several other Sisters and two lady teachers.

Among the assistants, no one, perhaps, deserves more credit or gratitude than Sister M. Cecilia, who for more than twenty-five years has directed the musical exercises of the Convent and Boarding-school.

Showing a natural talent for music in her early childhood, and possessing a fine voice, her own progress in this art has been remarkable, and her services inestimable as teacher of music and directress of the choir. She is assisted in her work by Sister M. Margarita, one of the younger Sisters of the Community.

The Belgians, like many other European nations, are great lovers of music. Thus, since a large number of pupils take music lessons, the monotony of school life is broken by the melody of many instruments and the sweet harmony of children's voices.

There is no place where the influence of soft, sweet music is so effective as in the church or chapel during devotional exercises. Nowhere are greater pains taken to de-

velop this art as a branch of education than in the Convent schools, and nowhere are the results obtained more gratifying.

Sister M. Amelia, the only child of the well-known family Le Duc, of Mechelen, entered the Convent at the age of sixteen, and having completed the Normal course in St. Nicholas, took charge of one of the higher departments in the Boarding-school. She teaches French and Flemish, also drawing, painting and penmanship. The English and German languages are taught in the higher departments.

Proceeding from the Boarding-school, the visitor is led around to the long playground of the Parochial School of Willebroeck. Here between six and seven hundred girls form the long line which is marching through the gate of "d' Externat." Each division is in charge of one or more Sisters, who conduct the children safely through the street a little beyond the Post-office. Here the procession breaks up, and the children scatter in all directions and run on to their homes in the different parts of the town.

Scarcely have the Sisters finished dinner, when the throng of pupils are at the gate again, eager for admittance. See them coming from all directions, and listen to the clatter of their wooden shoes on the stone pavement! Truly happy in their child-like simplicity, strong, healthy and active, they are worthy descendants of a sturdy old race. When the gate is opened, crowds rush into the yard and begin their games of tag, jump the rope, hide and seek, etc., just as easily in those hard "blokken" as their next-door neighbors, the "Pensionnaires" (Boarders), in fine high-heeled shoes.

The continual use of wooden shoes is hurtful to the feet. They hinder the development of natural gracefulness in walking and cause the feet to become large and very flat.

Sister M. Stanislas superintends the Parochial School. Though small of stature and very delicate, she has worked for years in the cause of education and has become one of the most prominent teachers in the province. In company with her associates, the assistant teachers, she attends the conferences, writes articles on education and con-

ference work, directs the sewing department; in a word, it is greatly due to her zeal, energy and Christian charity, that the Girls' Catholic School of Willebroeck has attained as high a standing as the highly paid public schools of the district.

On leaving "d' Externat" (parochial school) one enters that part of the garden especially assigned to the use of the Sisters during recreation. It adjoins the large garden which is at the service of strangers on Sundays and visiting days. From the main path, in the middle of the garden, a fine view can be had of that quaint old Convent, some of whose buildings have stood there over a hundred years. On the right rises the new school, containing several large classrooms on one side; and on the other, the bakery, laundry, free sewing and household schools. At a short distance from the school is the "Gloriette" (arbor), or summer house, surrounded by a very beautiful collection of rose bushes, then in full bloom. There are beds also containing many varieties of flowers, palms and evergreens.

In the distance is seen the Convent chapel, with its small belfry. It seems so insignificant in comparison with the majestic tower of the old parish church of Willebroeck, which, probably, has weathered the storms of centuries.

On the right-hand side of the chapel is found the "Grotto," or Shrine of Our Blessed Lady of Lourdes." It is here that the children, during the summer evenings, sing their sweetest hymns; here also that the Sisters, after a tiresome day's work, kneel in spirit a few moments at the feet of their "Holy Mother" and patroness, who gave to the world the first perfect model of Convent life, when as a child she parted with her dearly beloved parents, St. Joachim and St. Anna, and entered the Temple of Jerusalem, where the years of her childhood were passed in work, in prayer, and in devout communion with the Divine Being, who was "Lord of the Temple."

The number of Religious now in the Convent is fifty. They are Sisters of the Augustinian Order, bearing the name of Filles de Marie (Daughters of Mary). The Mother

House, wherein reside the Superior General, Rev. Mother M. Berchmans, and Assistant Superior, Rev. Sister M. Gabrielle, is, and has been for about fifty years, in the town of Willebroeck, in the Province of Antwerp, Belgium.

In this house all the younger Sisters are received, trained, and make their profession, which consists in the solemn pronunciation of the three holy vows of religion.

Many of the younger Sisters complete their normal course for school teachers during their novitiate.

The mission houses are Thisselt, Blaesvelt, Aertselaar and Bonheyden. All the Sisters are Belgians, except one.

During the last eighteen years five of the members have celebrated the golden jubilee, or fiftieth anniversary of their entrance into the Community. One of these, Rev. Mother M. Magdalena, was the sister of the late well-known and highly esteemed Bishop of Richmond, Va., Rt. Rev. A. Van de Vyver, D. D. She entered at the age of eighteen and lived fifty-seven years in the Convent.



We stood by the death-bed of all these dear old members who had given the flower and fruit of their long and useful lives to the advance of education and religion. We observed the peaceful resignation on the countenance of each dying Sister, and the smile of heavenly joy on her lips. The death of each one of these was for the Community as the passing away of a sunbeam. For them it was only a happy transition from the sorrows of time to the joys of eternity. We gazed on those faces so pure, so calm, so majestic, even after the spirit had fled, and recalled the words of Holy Scripture, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," and again, "The death of the just is precious in the sight of the Lord."

Besides the above named, there are a number of Sisters in the Convent who have already celebrated their "Silver Jubilee," or twenty-fifth anniversary of their entrance.

Under the administration of the so-called Liberal party in Belgium, in the year 1879, the Catholic schools, being deprived of financial assistance from the Government, were closed.

A new School Law was passed, and the Crucifix and images of the saints were prohibited in the schools. Many Catholic teachers resigned. The clergy and rich Catholic families built schools of their own, which were supported by gifts.

Our Community provided schools for the poor children of Willebroeck, and furnished the classrooms with desks, books and all necessary supplies. The eight Sisters who taught received only 2,000 francs per year, which was less than fifty dollars for each Sister, and the predicament of the Sisters became more or less alarming. Several prominent gentlemen in the town, among whom was Mr. Erix, the father of our present Sister M. Aloisia, went around taking up collections for the pressing necessities of the Community.

In the year 1866, when the cholera broke out in Willebroeck, three Sisters went to the hospital; and, without any compensation whatever, remained with their patients. Later, about the year 1891, the same disease broke out again. The Liberal Burgomaster, Mr. De Naeyer, being in great need of

assistance, came to the Convent and asked for Sisters as nurses. Regardless of their past grievances, occasioned by the bitter opposition of the Liberals to the Catholic schools, eager only to do good, five strong, able-bodied Sisters, at the request of their Superior, left the Convent and went to the temporary hospital which had been hastily erected in the town.

Here they remained day and night, in the midst of death and disease, at the bedside of their stricken fellow-creatures until the epidemic ceased. Strange to say, not one of the Sisters contracted the disease, although numbers of their patients died each day.

Only two of those heroines of charity and self-sacrifice now survive: Sister M. Theresia and Sister M. Perpetua. These two Sisters, feeble and aged, were obliged to take flight into Holland last September, but have now returned, with several others, to their Convent home in Willebroeck.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CLOISTER.

Proceeding from the little Grotto of Lourdes, where the Sisters kneel in the evening for their "Drie Wees Gegroeten" (three Hail Marys), one passes through the large, stone-paved playground, over the small yard, and enters the corridor leading to the Chapel.

Passing through the yard, we observe the Novitiate on the left. This may be considered the preparatory school of religious life. Here no one is received under the age of twenty-one, without full consent of parents or guardians. Immediately a regular course of training begins, in which the duties and obligations of religious life are clearly presented. No applicant is permitted to take the vows who has not voluntarily responded to the requirements of the Novitiate.

Before taking the vows, every postulant, if not satisfied, is perfectly free to return to her own home. Thus the obligations which bind one to religious life are not incurred

by entering a Convent or taking the veil, as some people suppose, but by the solemn and voluntary pronunciation of the vows, which in our Community may not take place without special dispensation, in less than a year after receiving the habit. In the Novitiate a Training Class has been established for those who intend to teach school. If not already graduates, this course is usually followed by the novice, who later enters the Normal School.

The experiences of the Novitiate make a life-long impression on the mind, and are regarded by the religious of more mature years as the scenes of childhood in the home circle are looked upon by the people of the world.

On the right of the hall is seen the large folding door leading to the Community room of the Sisters. This apartment, especially devoted to the private use of the "professed members," is never entered by the worldling, except with special permission from higher authority, and then only in case of necessity, as, for instance, a workman, for necessary repairs.

Enter then in spirit this earthly paradise and try, if possible, to comprehend the charm which permeates it. Here we meet rich and poor, old and young. They call each other "Sister." They greet in passing with these words, "Geloofd Zij Jezus Christus" (Praised Be Jesus Christ), to atone for the profane use of the sacred Name by the vulgar.

The Sisters are all dressed alike; thus, no vain love of dress, no envy, no jealousy. They lose no precious time at the dressing table, and no money is wasted in following the vagaries and follies of every changing season. Their food is the same (exceptions being made for the sick and feeble), simple and substantial, neither rich nor dainty. The result is, as a rule, a measure of health and physical strength unknown in the circles of society.

The rules and regulations to which they voluntarily subject themselves relieve them of all care and encumbrance as to the future. Each member performs her work as faithfully and diligently as possible; and the good "All Father" provides. They join

each other in prayer and in the recreation. They assist each other in pain, in sickness and sorrow, and comfort one another in the hour of death.

The work of the members is not the same. Each has a special office or work to perform.

As the different organs of the body co-operate in preserving life, and even the smallest screw in the locomotive is necessary to the accomplishment of its work, so does each member contribute to the spiritual life and well-being of the Community.

From this place is banished all that makes life miserable for millions of people. That is, particularly, the great desire of worldly possession—having, ever having, and never having enough—also, the ever-increasing desire and search for pleasure, pastime and self-satisfaction; but finding only pain, chagrin and remorse; that is, finally, the insatiable desire for freedom from all bonds and fetters which sanctify the soul and keep the body in restraint; and while thus seeking liberty, one finds, as a rule, in himself a most cruel tyrant for master.

The Sisters retire at an appointed hour and arise at the first sound of the bell. They work faithfully and industriously all day long, all year long, all their lives.

Their wages are neither gold nor silver. They are the eternal merits which they know awaits them in a better life. The false and artificial customs of the world are strangers here. This short and sorrowful life is looked upon as a pilgrimage in a land of exile, or as the passage of a train from which the traveler joyfully observes the fleeting objects along the route, well knowing that every disappearing mile-post reduces the distance between him and his dearly beloved home.

The Sisterhood is as a garden of many flowers, where the pure white lily never loses its beauty, where the red rose of love has made place for the pure white blossom of Christian Charity; and the fragrant little violet of humility diffuses incense to the angels who ascend and descend about the Throne of God.

People often condole the Religious closed up within the prison walls of the Convent



and forever deprived of the joys and pleasures of the world. Little they know that within these same walls the heart is as free as the flight of the bird, while the soul in solitude is in constant communion with God, whose Divine Presence is felt in the life that surrounds her.

She hears His voice in the gentle sigh of the breeze, in the hum of the bee, in the song of the bird and in the soft murmur of the little brooklet breaking over the mountain-side. His wonderful attributes become visible to a certain degree in every object around her. She admires His Divine Providence in the fatherly care which He takes of His creatures. Even the tiniest insect and the smallest blade of grass show forth the love, wisdom and the goodness of God.

The soul in solitude, hidden within the Convent walls, admires the grandeur and glory of God as manifested in the majestic rising and setting of the sun, and its influence over all nature. God's beauty is seen in the color of the clouds and in the ever-varying tints of the sky. The fragrance of the flowers reminds her of the odor of sanc-

tity which a Christian should leave in his wake; and if, as sometimes occurs, one observes anything which mars the beautiful face of Nature or disturbs the peaceful course of events, it brings to mind the revolting sight of a soul in sin and the remorse and confusion it must suffer.

The wave on the ocean's breast; those giant rocks on the shore; the mountains and little hills; the river flowing on to the sea; the moss and ferns in the wood; in a word, every object in and around proclaim to the religious the omnipotence and omnipresence of Him who created them.

The soul detached from the temporal, and seeking only the eternal, forsakes the creature to find the Creator; and, having found Him, has found what her heart desired.

What are, then, the pleasures of earth to those who have tasted the sweetness of Grace; more delicious than the luxuries of a thousand worlds? They speak no more of the past, since for them a new and happier life has begun. With eyes and hearts fixed on heaven, they have forgotten the earth and, enraptured, cry out:

“Laetatus sum in his qui dicta sunt mihi;  
in domum domini ibimus.” (I was rejoiced  
at those things which were said to me: We  
shall go into the house of the Lord.)

## CHAPTER V.

## THE APPROACHING STORM.

July's sun sank gently away on the western horizon, and its last rays lit up the ripening fruit, the plants and flowers in the garden. It seemed to linger for a last farewell to the groups of merry children who, unconscious of their fast-approaching woe, were cheerfully singing Belgium's well-known national song, "The Proud Flemish Lion."

In a few moments the "Golden Gate" closed on a field of purple haze, shutting out that blessed glimpse of heaven, while the black shroud of the most dismal night in history darkened the sky of that hapless nation.

The Sisters were together in the evening recreation of that fateful day, when word was received that King Albert of Belgium, in order to fulfill his obligations of neutrality, had refused the Kaiser's army access to his territory to attack the French. Had a thunderbolt fallen from a clear sky,

or an earthquake shaken the ground under foot, it would scarcely have surprised or terrorized the people more than did the Kaiser's declaration of war against this free and happy little kingdom.

When hostilities broke out between Austria and Servia, while realizing the possibility of trouble in the country in case of a general war, we were assured that Belgium, being a neutral nation and having no other desire than that of possessing her own soil, and living in peace with all nations, had nothing to fear from war or invasion.

Feeble human insight into the designs of Providence, whose hand has the power to destroy and rebuild, to crown or dethrone kings and kaisers, and seal the fate of nations.

It is not our object to discuss the causes of the present European war from a material point of view, nor do we intend to pass judgment upon the nations or individuals engaged in it; nevertheless, viewing the present condition of affairs in Europe from another standpoint, and drawing conclusions from observation and personal experience,

we must admit that a spiritual warfare had been raging there for several years.

Certainly, God, who is the source of peace, virtue and every good, should have been permitted to hold sovereign sway in His own kingdom; that is, in the hearts of His children and in the homesteads of His people. This right was disregarded in a most ruthless manner for many years, as is evident from the fact that the word "*God*" and everything pertaining to God, was expunged from the text-books in some places in Europe, while it would have been a serious offense for a teacher to mention His sacred name or anything in connection therewith in the classroom.

The spirit of atheism and agnosticism contended against the Spirit of Religion, and as a scourging wind was fast sweeping over the land, leaving by the wayside thousands of incautious souls bereft of all ennobling possessions of mind and heart.

The vices and vanities of pagan Rome were reviving before our very eyes in about the same manner as they had been prevalent over twenty hundred years ago; and, al-

though idolatrous shrines were not found in the homesteads, they could easily be found in the hearts of many people.

Modern life in Europe, especially in the large cities, had to a certain degree, lost its high ideal of perfection, as did the world in the time of Noah; and, consequently, it does not seem indiscreet to intimate that the same Supremacy which chastised the world in the great flood, has, for the same reason, reappeared and become manifest in the deluge of blood which now inundates the soil of those unhappy nations.

Civilization, wealth, industry and intellect developed in times of peace and prosperity, so as to reach apparently the limit of effort, have exhausted their entire resources up to this time to construct means suitable for destroying themselves.

Now the question has been asked, "Why could not Christianity, after a period of about twenty hundred years on earth, have prevented this cruel war and saved the honor of civilization?" The answer is not difficult to find. Christianity could and would have saved humanity from this

dreadful misfortune had it not been for the fact that her power had been checked, her authority limited, her work hindered and her ranks weakened by those heavy storms which, though unable to uproot the Divine Institution, have impeded her progress and lessened her influence over the human race.

When the happy day dawns in which the true spirit of Christianity, free and unfettered, will animate civilization as the soul animates the body, then, and not till then, will its powerful influence be able to dispel the shades of darkness in the minds of men, and in the palaces of kings and kaisers. Then will war cease and the reign of peace and happiness begin.



## CHAPTER VI.

## CHANGES.

When our minds, bewildered by the unexpected course which affairs had taken, fully comprehended that the country was at war, a feeling of dismay and terror, never before experienced, took possession of all.

Suitable measures were adopted for the safety of the children under our care, to whom the usual prizes were distributed on the first Sunday in August, a week before the ordinary time of vacation. Permission was also given them to return to their homes the following day. All necessary preparations were made as quickly as possible, and early next morning the boarders, accompanied by one or more Sisters, departed in groups to their homes in the surrounding cities and towns.

The parochial and public schools of the village continued in session for a few days, as the children were all residents, and no immediate danger was anticipated.

Subsequently, while the train containing a party of our pupils en route for Mechelen (Malines) was steaming on at full speed, it was hailed by a troop of Belgian soldiers, and instantly slackened up. All passengers were obliged to alight and, with satchels and small baggage in hand, had to make their way to the city as best they could, a walk of an hour or more. The soldiers boarded the train, which immediately started off to another station.

At home the general cleaning and arrangement of the Boarding-school began, and in a few days the united assistance of strong hands and willing hearts have accomplished the work, and the Sisters quietly await developments.

During this time several workmen were busy excavating a cellar in the yard. On a certain morning the implements remained idly standing by the wall, as the workmen had been called out to assist in the all-important work of strengthening the fortification of Willebroeck. This cellar, half filled with water by the dislodgment of the pipes leading to the cisterns, became later the re-

ceptacle of the bomb which passed through the chapel, shattering the walls and windows in its course.

One night a great noise in the streets aroused the residents of Willebroeck. It was the call for several classes of soldiers who were obliged to rise, pack their kits and depart in a few hours, perhaps never more to return to their homes or families. Sorrow filled many a homestead that morning, but it was only a faint shadow of what was yet to come.

Shortly afterwards it was announced that all the horses were to be brought to the public market-place in each city and village. Here they were examined and those unfit rejected. We know not whether any compensation was given to the owners at this time, although promise was made to make good the loss sustained at the close of the war. All the horses which could be of any service had to be given up for the use of the army. There were some people who gave seven, some nine, and one, we knew, who gave thirteen or fourteen. Thus, just about the time that the harvest was ripe in the fields, men

and horses had to leave home and go to meet death on the field of battle. Imagine the plight of women and children, with every kind of hard work on hand and no one to help. How happy they were when, as happened occasionally, their poor old horses were rejected by the officers. Shortly thereafter all the bicycles and motor cars had to be delivered, and yet neither complaint nor murmur was heard on the part of the people, who patiently resigned themselves to the unhappy lot which had befallen them.

The gazettes and daily papers were eagerly read, although little reliable information could be obtained. Encouraging news in the evening was usually contradicted in the morning, while reports of the most terrible atrocities; of men murdered in cold blood; of open and gross lawlessness and evil conduct, terrorized the peaceful population in the unprotected towns and villages.

Shortly after the war began letters were received from His Eminence, Card. Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, requesting the use of the schools and other locales for a

military hospital to be placed at the service of the Red Cross.

Again a few days of quiet anticipation elapse, like the calm which precedes a destructive storm; while the Sisters utilize the time in the unusual occupation of changing the joyful abode of children into a fit dwelling for death and misery.

The children's refectory was arranged for the care of wounded officers; the large reception hall was fitted up for wounded soldiers, also the three dormitories and several classrooms. One classroom became an office for chaplain and doctors. Another department became an operating room. Another was reserved for cases of contagious disease which might occur, while another room was used as a mortuary.

One Sunday morning, about the middle of August, an unusual tumult was heard on the street. The door bell was loudly rung, and a messenger admitted with news that the officers of the Belgian War Department had commanded everything within firing range of the fortress to be cleared away at once. For some time previous the soldiers

had been busy cutting down the groves and all the trees in the immediate vicinity of the fortress. The poor people were given just three hours to get away with bag and baggage.

Willebroeck, a large village between Antwerp and Brussels, about two miles from the City of Boom, had increased greatly in population, wealth and manufacturing during the years of peace and prosperity which had elapsed since the last war. Thus it happened that stores, dwelling houses, farm houses, breweries, paper mills and other industries had been built up, regardless of the fortification near by, whose grass-covered walls concealed the strong masonry and heavy cannon within.

This was a terrible misfortune for about six hundred families, whose dwellings, being located within the limits prescribed, had to be leveled to the ground. Even the tombstones in the cemetery, together with all the crops, trees, haystacks, barns and everything within range of the gaping mouths of the cannon, had to be laid flat or taken away.

No wonder that the people raced to and fro that hot Sunday morning, carrying bundles, dragging wagons with household furniture and fixtures; wheeling trunks, clothing, stoves, pictures, bedding and every article that could be taken up and carried away. Tears and perspiration rolled over the cheeks of men and women, whose faces glowed from the heat and intense excitement.

Fortunately, the first message was followed by another whereby the people were allowed more time to get their personal property in safety before the work of "burning off" began. Impossible to describe how bitterly hard it was for these poor people to tear themselves away from the homes which had cost them so much toil, labor and hardship.

The new Sewing School and laundry, the Parochial School, the Girls' Public School, the Patronage (Boys' Catholic School), and all other large locales received the village refugees. In a short time cows, horses, chickens, coal, grain, vegetables, furniture and everything that one can well imagine

filled up the schools and gardens. The cattle, unused to the change and flurry, set up a dreadful howling, which continued long into the night.

In one schoolroom we had the contents of a grocery store; in another the costly furniture of one of the richest gentlemen in the town; while several families took up their abode in the midst of the clothing, furniture and bedding in the schools. How we all worked that day, carrying out desks and piling them up in safe places, putting away books, school utensils—as many as possible in the least possible space. Every available spot on the ground was utilized, except those rooms assigned to the private use of the Sisters, and the Boarding-school, which was reserved for the use of the Red Cross.

The poor people resigned themselves to these changes without complaint or murmur; and the Sisters, notwithstanding the disorder and confusion caused by this state of affairs, did all that was possible to assist and make them comfortable.



## CHAPTER VII.

## WAR.

It is only when a common calamity, such as this, threatens not only the happiness, but also the very existence, of a whole nation, and the inundating tide of misfortune rises to the very doors of rich and poor, that the fountains of true Christian Charity spring open and lave with refreshing draughts the parched lips of the afflicted. The same burden that one bears on his shoulder is borne in the heart of another, who, while alleviating the wants of his neighbor, must think of his own approaching ruin.

In such moments, while the seal of humble submission is stamped on the sorrow-stricken heart of suffering humanity, the haughty arrogance of creatures recedes before that resistless Power which shapes the destinies of men and nations, despite the best-laid plans and precautions.

The work of "burning off" the houses did not proceed rapidly enough, as the walls were of stone, and the roofs of tile or slate,

and much of the wooden furniture had been removed, so pulleys, brought into action by electricity, were adjusted to the walls, and thus these houses, so dear to the hearts of the people, were actually pulled over upon the ground. Whole streets had to be leveled and all the residents left without a shelter. Many of these did not possess the means of providing other homes. However, the firm hope of final victory and the restoration of their lost property sustained them in this dark and dreary hour.

In the meantime a most terrible battle was taking place at the fortification of Liege. Was ever attack so strong, or resistance more determined? Belgian officers said "The enemy were twenty to one against us; but, being obliged to face the terrible fires of the fortress, their ranks were cut down in about the same manner as wheat it cut off by the reaper." "So great was the number of the Germans that they seemed to spring up out of the ground." "They crawled ahead on hands and feet, and at a given signal sprang erect and fired, and then again prostrated themselves. Thus

they advanced, avoiding as much as possible the heavy fires in front." Another Belgian officer at the fortress during the battle said: "It resembled a storm of fiery hailstones from a cloud of smoke, in an atmosphere suffocating with heat and the smell of powder."

Eyewitnesses relate that heaps of slain, yards high, were found on the battle field, while columns of lifeless bodies were observed in a standing position, there being no place for the dead to fall.

A story was told by one of the Belgian officers of a German soldier who, when wounded by a Belgian in a hand-to-hand combat, took out a coin and presented it. The Belgian, surprised, exclaimed "Zijt gij zot?" (Are you crazy?) "Do you not know that I've broken your arm?" "Yes," said the German, "This is to show my gratitude for the favor you've rendered me, since it gives me the opportunity of leaving the battle field."

Much was said about the valor of the soldiers on both sides during the siege of Liege. The Germans were obliged to advance in

the face of destructive fires. If one should retreat, he would be pierced by the bayonet of the soldier behind him.

Certain it is, whether we observe the Germans as friends or foes, all must admit that their courage, endurance and military tactics have surprised the whole world.

Sad it is to think that such manhood, intelligence and bravery is not trained to love the conquests of peace.

The Belgians, far inferior in number, fought with a valor which clearly shows the undying love of country and of freedom which has ever been a distinguishing characteristic of this noble-minded race.

It is not the first time that her fields have been deluged with the blood of her heroes, in whose honor and memory we find, in the flag of Belgium, beside the yellow, which signifies the kingdom, a red stripe to remind her people of the blood shed for freedom, and a black stripe in mourning for her slain.

While facing death in this first great battle at the fortress of Liege, one of the soldiers began to sing the well-known national hymn, "The Proud Flemish Lion." Im-

mediately the strains were taken up by the whole regiment, and thus singing, they advanced until hundreds of them fell in that awful conflict.

In the heaviest of the fray we were told that King Albert had placed himself in the lines with his soldiers. He did not desire to be called king, but comrade. His military dress was distinguished from the others by only a small mark on one of the sleeves. He attended to the correspondence for his soldiers and was regarded by them as a friend and father, under whose guidance they were ready to fight and die.

When the siege was over he visited the wounded in many of the hospitals and addressed each soldier in person.

As I remember, the siege of Liege lasted about two weeks. Finally, the strong walls of the fortress began to give way, thus demonstrating the uselessness of the old-time means of protection when obliged to withstand the shells and bombs of modern siege guns.

The German officers themselves praised the valor of the Belgians. We were

told that the German commander refused to accept the sword from the Belgian officer, unwilling to submit the latter to this humiliation, since it was not for want of valor or through any fault of his that the fort had to be surrendered, but on account of the superior forces of the enemy and the all-destroying power of his heavy siege guns, some of which were said to shoot a distance of nearly thirty miles.

Needless to dwell upon the horrors which took place throughout the length and breadth of the country after the entrance of the enormous army of the Germans, whose plans had been so unexpectedly frustrated by the determined resistance of the Belgians.

These fought long and valiantly in expectation of assistance from the Allies, who, unprepared for the sudden progress of the campaign, were unable to render the necessary assistance in the beginning of the war. This is the explanation which was given by both the French and English as to the tardiness in the arrival of the help expected from those countries.

After the fall of Liege, when the enemy entered the city, the Rt. Rev. Bishop of the diocese, the Burgomaster of the city and several others of the more prominent residents were taken prisoners as hostages. These, as a rule, are put to death if the requirements of the enemy be not exactly met.

Some time later we heard that these hostages were set at liberty.

Then followed the destruction of many cities, towns and villages along the route, including the noted City of Louvain, the heart of Catholic Belgium, the principal place of her Christian educational institutions, and the seat of her missionary forces.

Consternation filled the minds of the Belgians at the needless destruction of this ancient city, with its treasures of art and sculpture, its schools, colleges, libraries, and particularly its world-renowned university.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE CARNAGE OF BATTLE.

After the fall of Liege and Namur, the destruction of Louvain and a number of noted cities, towns and villages, our minds were concerned with that awe-inspiring event—the advance of the enemy to Brussels.

Well do we remember that beautiful summer evening, when our prayers and evening meditation in the chapel were disturbed for about an hour by the continuous whirl of automobiles passing the Convent. We were told that evening that it was the departure of the legislative body from Brussels to Antwerp, with the archives and treasures of the Government.

Our hearts seemed to grow cold and leaden within us as we sat there hoping, praying, fearing, yet instinctively feeling the doom so rapidly approaching.

One gloomy, rainy day, word came that over two thousand soldiers of the Civil Guard had lowered their weapons at the



approach of the enemy and quietly surrendered the City of Brussels, Belgium's beautiful capital. To have fought without fortifications against such superior forces as the Germans possessed would have been a useless sacrifice of life.

Strict, in the extreme, were the regulations enforced by the Germans in the different places which they entered. They also levied enormous war taxes. Bold and undaunted even to the verge of imprudence, as was then remarked by the Belgians, was the conduct of Burgomaster Max, of Brussels, in his conduct toward the enemy.

The work of strengthening and completing the fortification of Willebroeck, said to be amongst the strongest in the world, continued, while a large number of soldiers, as watch guards, were constantly on duty.

The electricity which supplied light to the village and kept many a motor propelling, was entirely cut off from the houses and public buildings and concentrated at the fort.

Two thousand workmen engaged in the paper factories of Mr. Louis De Naeyer

were out of work. Charitable ladies, aided by Madame De Naeyer, of the Castle of Willebroeck, and assisted in the work by some of the Sisters, met daily at the Boys' Public School and made ready a good, strong soup, which was dealt out in cans or pitchers to the destitute families of these poor workmen.

The paper factories, the Castle of Blaesvelt, belonging to a former Belgian Ambassador to Washington, whose wife was a native of that city, and the large and newly equipped breweries of the Erix families, were stripped of their machinery and made to serve as fortresses by boring holes through their walls for the reception of cannon and *mettrailleusen* (machine guns). The paper factory itself, commanding a good position near the bridge of the canal, was so arranged that it could be flooded at a moment's warning; and this was actually done, as we were informed by the refugees in England, when the battle at the fortress took place prior to the fall of Antwerp.

During the progress of the campaign in the vicinity at that time, several occur-

rences affected, in a great measure, every aspect of daily life for the quiet residents of Willebroeck, and particularly for the Sisters, unaccustomed as they were to any participation in the affairs of the world, except such as were imperative for the direction and maintenance of their schools.

These were: First, the arrival of the Red Cross and wounded soldiers, some six weeks before our departure from Antwerp; second, the return of the army; third, the flight of the refugees; fourth, the daily increasing and ever nearer approaching roar of the cannonade.

One afternoon in the middle of August a large, heavy wagon was drawn into the yard. It bore the flag of the Red Cross on top, and on the side in great white letters the words "Military Hospital."

In a few minutes a fleshy little gentleman, who at once distinguished himself as the "Chef" (chief), and a number of other gentlemen, about thirty-five in all, wearing white bands with red crosses on their arms, and long white linen coats over their uniforms, such as bakers sometimes wear,

were seen hurrying to and fro, unpacking and carrying their various instruments and utensils to the operating room.

A military chaplain and four or more doctors accompanied the group. All except the chaplain were dressed in uniform. Several young ladies of Willebroeck, former members of our Boarding-school, dressed in white and wearing the head-dress and armband of the Red Cross, came next day and graciously presented themselves to aid in taking care of the wounded.

The services rendered by the Red Cross in time of war is simply inestimable. "When circumstances permit, there are three different posts or places where the wounded are treated," said the village doctor who assisted in training the young lady volunteers to the Red Cross army. "The first post is only a few yards distant from the battle field and as near as possible to the firing line. This post is very dangerous. Only volunteers are sent there, as a rule. The members go out on the field in search of the wounded, amid the continual bursting of partially exploded shells. One careless step may cause

serious wounds or instant death. Then again, after a battle has been fought, there is occasional shooting, even in the night; but the members of the Red Cross have consecrated themselves to the service of the sick and wounded soldiers, and God gives them strength and courage according to their necessities."

When found, the wounded are brought into the first post on stretchers or in ambulance wagons, and only those attentions which are absolutely necessary are given. Then they are taken to the second post or hospital, where a more thorough examination takes place and the necessary operations are performed, which consist principally in the extraction of bullets, setting and amputation of broken limbs, etc.

Here they remain until they become convalescent, unless the number of wounded soldiers increases to such a degree as to prevent proper care being taken of them, in which case they are taken away to a third hospital, where they are supposed to remain until their wounds are entirely healed.

Then they ardently desire, if not maimed, to return again to the front.

When a seriously wounded soldier is brought into the hospital, he is stripped of his clothing, wrapped in a sheet and carried to the operating room. This service is rendered by the gentlemen of the Red Cross. One or more of the lady nurses assist at the operation. If the soldier is mortally wounded and there is apprehension of immediate dissolution, he remains in the sheets and is lovingly cared for by these gentlemen until death occurs. Then the body is rolled in the sheet, placed in a coffin and buried the next day.

Coffins were provided by our village for the soldiers who died in our hospital. One day nine were carried away to the cemetery; another day, two; then one or two. Several were dead or at the point of death when they were brought into the hospital.

One poor factory woman came inquiring for her husband. We did not dare tell her that he died immediately when brought in, but left this sad task for Rev. Mother Superior.

On another day a woman and her daughter-in-law came from a great distance inquiring for her son, the young woman's husband. Heart-rending was their anguish when they were told that he was already a week buried. These and numberless cases of like character indicate what war is, even when viewed from a favorable standpoint.

All the clothing of the wounded soldiers was carried at once to our new steam laundry, where it underwent a most thorough washing and disinfection. This clothing was, for the most part, stiff with mud, saturated with blood and badly torn. When dried it was given back to those in charge of the army. The Sisters and servant-maids performed this work. They were assisted by the women refugees of Willebroeck, whose houses were burned off on account of the fortress. Washing took place every day and continued until late in the night.

The condition of the poor maimed soldiers was sad to behold. One man, we were told by the Red Cross nurses, had twenty bullets in his body; another was pierced through the lung by a bayonet; one, aged

twenty, lost an arm to the shoulder; one had only one or two fingers left on the hand; one was crazed by a bullet which touched the brain; another was shot through the mouth, the bullet lodging in the back of the throat. His case was especially distressing, his the most intense suffering of all. He lived for a week without eating, drinking or speaking.

Three wounded Germans were brought in, being picked up on the battle field by members of our division of the Red Cross. They seemed greatly distressed and afraid, positively refusing to touch food or drink of which the Sisters or nurses did not first partake. One was a German lieutenant, under whose direction, as he himself admitted, great damage had been done in one of the large cities. He was given the distinction of a bed among the Belgian officers. He was very ill at ease in their presence, in the beginning, but becoming reassured and observing the impartiality of Sisters and nurses, he desired to remain in our hospital rather than be removed to a third post.



One day we were called upon to witness a most sorrowful sight. A small farmer's wagon drove up to the gate, bearing the lifeless bodies of two children, a girl aged eight and her brother, aged fourteen. The mother and a smaller child were also in the wagon. The mother related that they were taking flight as refugees. Seeing the enemy, they hastened to retreat, and were fired at by the soldiers. The children, who were in the back part of the wagon, were struck and wounded in a most frightful manner. The little girl's face was nearly all torn off, and the back of the boy's head had been shattered.

At the approach of Belgian soldiers, who fired at the enemy, the mother was enabled to pick up the lifeless bodies of her children, put them into the wagon and drive with them to our hospital, which was the nearest post.

These people were from Nieuwenrode, Province of Brabant. It was said that many German soldiers were in ambush, in this region, although no battle had occurred there. The Doctors Van Everbroeck and

DeLatte, who examined the bodies of these children, stated that they were shot at a distance of twenty meters.

The mother, suffering greatly from the shock, and the remaining child were taken to the village hospital.

Flour, soap and washing soda were supplied by the Government for the use of the soldiers. The Sisters performed the work and used a great deal of their own provisions for the wounded. A large quantity of linen for sheets, gowns and hand towels, was supplied by the "Chef" of the Red Cross. The Sisters, when not engaged in other work, spent the time in folding, hemming and stitching these articles and in preparing surgical dressings for the wounded.

Several Sisters and at least two lady nurses remained in charge of the different wards day and night. The most perfect order and discipline prevailed. The wounded soldiers who were at all able to get around walked in the garden or rested and visited with their families, who came to see them.

The tender care of mothers for their children could not surpass the devoted kindness

of the members of the Red Cross in their services to the wounded. Nothing that could be done to assist or alleviate their sufferings was omitted. The soldiers were to each other as brothers of one family. We have seen them carrying in, on stretchers, their weary, foot-sore comrades, and with the tenderest care take off the clumsy, muddy shoes, gently strip the blistered feet of the coarse stockings and, on bended knees, bathe and bandage them.

The first division of the Red Cross which came to our Hospital was with us about five weeks. One evening about seven o'clock, some time after Brussels had been occupied by the Germans, a dispatch came to the "Chef" commanding the Red Cross to leave Willebroeck at once and go to another station. Again there was hurrying to and fro. The large wagon was opened and everything hastily packed in. In the different wards the poor wounded soldiers, obliged to leave their beds, were sitting silent and motionless, while tears were in their eyes. Later in the night motor cars came and took them all away. The German lieutenant,

on account of the condition in which he was found by the physicians, could not be removed at that time and remained until the departure of the second ambulance.

Preparations for the departure of the Red Cross continued most of the night. With the continual running back and forth, and the noise produced by taking up and laying down boxes and bundles, there was no rest to be obtained.

Before seven in the morning all the wards were empty. One or two soldiers, whose condition did not permit of their removal, still remained. All noise and commotion had ceased and the silence of death reigned in the house.

A day or two of repose would have been a welcome boon to the Sisters, who were much fatigued at that time. However, rest was impossible, as we obtained a message that another division of the Red Cross was on its way to our hospital. So it happened that all the rooms and various apartments had to be cleaned and rearranged at once. This work took place immediately. Two days later, although the pungent smell of

disinfectants still pervaded the air, every ward was as neat and clean as if no wounded soldiers, no death, nor sorrow had entered there.

We did not know the cause of the sudden departure of the Red Cross, as the strictest secrecy was observed by the officers of the army; but we remarked a little later that this departure was necessary on account of the rapid advance of the fast-approaching enemy and the evident possibility of a heavy pitched battle at the fortress. In such a case the convalescent could not remain longer than was absolutely necessary. They were obliged to go in order to make place for the numerous wounded who were yet to come.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE RETURN OF THE ARMY.

A little after four o'clock one afternoon, shortly before the departure of the first division of the Red Cross, our attention was attracted by the heavy and continuous tread of cavalry and soldiers passing along the street. It was the Belgian army returning from a long and tiresome march.

Here was found a different kind of suffering from that which was ministered to in the hospital. Hunger and fatigue were stamped upon the countenance of each of these men, who, about a month before were industrious citizens at their daily occupations.

We saw them marching away in the early morning some time before, full of courage and patriotic zeal. For what reason they all marched off, or where they were going, we knew not; but were informed later by one of the officers that while on the march they had been attacked by the enemy, who were stealthily concealed, and fired into

their ranks from both sides of the road. Several of the soldiers were killed and a large number wounded, but, having retreated promptly and in order, no great loss of life was sustained.

There were in the ranks priests, in their long black cassocks, wearing the arm-band of the Red Cross, who, as volunteer chaplains, had joined the army and were ever at the service of the soldiers on the march, and even on the battle field. We were informed that priests, and those preparing for the priesthood, were not obliged to serve in the army in times of peace; but, in case of war, they may be called upon to serve as military chaplains. When the present war broke out, hundreds of them joined as volunteers, marching in the ranks with the soldiers and undergoing their sufferings and hardships.

Many doctors rode along in motor cars. They were distinguished by a special dark-colored uniform, with a red collar and gilded trimmings. They also wore the arm-band of the Red Cross. Officers on horseback led each division of the army. The faces of all were disfigured with sweat and

dust, while dust in abundance covered shoes and clothing. Some were staggering along, unable to walk straight, owing to the hard shoes and blistered feet. Hollow-cheeked, and with eyes which seemed to protrude from their sockets, they passed along, piteously imploring a morsel of bread.

Fortunately, the abundant supply of bread in the Convent had just been increased by the addition of forty of those immense loaves found only in Belgium. All of this was hastily cut, buttered and, with baskets full of pears, dealt out, piece by piece, to the passing soldiers, until, finally, only a small portion remained over for the supper of the wounded remaining in the hospital.

The servant maids went out to the village later in search of bread, but there was not a loaf to be found anywhere. All had been given to the soldiers. Two Sisters and one of the maids remained up all night. The oven was again heated and the usual supply of bread doubled.

Every large locale in the village from which, by the way, all non-resident refugees were obliged to depart, received the



various divisions of the army which were allotted to them. About two hundred soldiers were assigned to those parts of our Parochial School unoccupied by the village refugees or not in use by the Red Cross.

Before the command was given to enter the schools, we saw soldiers, among whom were also priests, lying on the ground on the opposite side of the street, even as horses which, having run a great distance, fall down from sheer exhaustion. Some of these, we learned afterwards, did not have their shoes off in nearly three weeks. The socks, hard and worn out, were in some cases stamped into the blistered feet in such a manner as to cause excruciating pain. In some cases the feet were so painful and swollen that the patients had to be carried in on stretchers. In the meantime, several ambulance wagons had stopped at the school gate, and numerous wounded were carried in.

When finally one division entered d' Externat, a hasty search was begun for hay and straw. All that could be found was carried into the garret of the schools and the empty classrooms.

The refugees of Willebroeck were very generous to the soldiers, giving them all the provisions which they could find. Many soldiers were seen with pails in their hands in search of water. Of this there was a good supply on the place, and more could readily be obtained at the cistern which was connected with the canal. In a short time they were refreshed and cleansed from the dust and sweat of that long and tiresome march, and were observed sitting in groups on the grass which surrounded the school.

Soon after a large door, which one of the refugees carried away from his house in the village before it was burned, was found. This was laid on two small heaps of stone, so as to form a table. About half an ox was procured and a large part of it chopped into small pieces and put into a big iron kettle, which was then filled with water. The kettle was placed on a wood fire kindled in the garden, and potatoes and other ingredients put into it. After a time it began to boil in a lively manner, greatly to the satisfaction of those poor hungry men who were so patiently waiting for their supper. When this

finally was ready, the knapsacks were opened and each took out a spoon and a small tin can, the cover of which served for plate, cup and saucer.

Probably the German General Staff failed to enjoy their bounteous supper that evening as well as did the poor Belgian soldiers their soup on the cool green grass. It must be remarked that each division was under the direction of an officer, who placed armed guards at the gates and passages. Perfect order prevailed. They talked quietly among themselves and remained strictly within the places assigned to their use; only once in a while one of them would knock at the kitchen door and ask for a can of water, which was soon understood to mean a can of cold coffee. This was never refused, and the grateful "Mercie" (thanks) was ample reward for the service rendered.

That night passed quietly. The soldiers had a good opportunity to rest on the hay and straw which had been provided. Some of them were astir at a very early hour. The large kettle was again placed over the fire and filled with water for the soldiers' break-

fast of bread and black coffee. Their only fear was that a message to depart would arrive before they would have a chance of "Coffie drinken" (drinking coffee, or breakfast).

At about eight o'clock one evening during the stay of the soldiers an excited group of eight men and two boys ran wildly into the yard through the gate, which had been left open for the soldiers not yet arrived. Great drops of sweat were on their faces. They were out of breath from running, and greatly excited. Some were bare-footed, having lost or thrown away their wooden shoes in the great haste to escape the enemy, who, they related, had entered a village three or four miles distant and had taken as prisoners a number of citizens and placed them in front of their own ranks. The boys had lost their parents in the confusion which ensued and were crying bitterly. They found a resting place somewhere in the schools that night and departed early next morning, because non-resident refugees were not permitted to remain after the arrival of the Red Cross.

The soldiers were called away several times for short intervals, after which they again returned for a rest. Thus the month of August passed. The frightful campaign progressed slowly but surely. Several times we had seen the hostile aeroplane, with its shining armor glittering in the sunshine, flying gracefully over our schools. How we then feared for our wounded, so helplessly lying within these same walls. One morning, about three o'clock, we were suddenly awakened by heavy, oft-repeated shooting, which seemed to proceed from the farther end of our garden. The alarm was caused by the appearance of an aeroplane soaring as a huge bird over the fortress. Mettrailleusen opened fire upon it, and the unwelcome visitor soon disappeared. However, we all feared its reappearance in the night. For this reason the towns and cities were kept in total darkness from eight o'clock in the evening, and searchlights illumined the dark clouds over and around the fortresses and other places of particular importance.

About this time we were informed that several thousand of the enemy's soldiers

were digging trenches and fortifying themselves on all sides of us. Every newspaper brought fresh tidings of most inhuman atrocities which filled the minds of the people with unspeakable horror.

In Belgium it was neither the German nation nor her soldiers, considered as a whole, who were held responsible for these awful outrages, because it was well known that there were among them many noble characters and Christians, renowned for their piety and fidelity to God and country, who were sacrificing their lives for what they thought to be a just and holy cause and whose families were also suffering and sorrowing at home.

It was alone, as should be known by everyone, the Godless element in the German army, led on and sustained by equally Godless officers, who encouraged, permitted and probably commanded those crimes, as we infer from the testimony of German wounded soldiers in our Red Cross hospitals. "If we do not shoot, burn and pillage," said one of them, "we shall be shot ourselves."

It seems incredible that any one claiming Christian convictions of any creed or country, could have acted as did the so-called barbarians who despoiled many of the most beautiful cities, towns and villages of Belgium.

## CHAPTER X.

## ANXIOUS DAYS.

Early one morning, while passing through the yard, we heard what seemed to be peals of distant thunder. We looked around to see if a storm was approaching, but as the sun shone brightly and not a cloud was to be seen in the sky, we soon realized what this dismal sound implied. On entering the Convent, we found several of our members standing by the map of Belgium, tracing the route of portions of the German army then endeavoring to force their way through to Antwerp.

The firing heard in the garden came from the bombardment of the City of Mechelen. The first attack did not continue so long, nor was the damage so great, as in the attacks which followed. The noise of the cannonade increased from that day forward. Hardly a day or night passed without bringing the unwelcome sound from one or the other direction. It often happened that, having retired at a late hour after a long and fatigu-



ing day's work, the short repose was interrupted by the explosion of bombs or cannon balls, which, although then at a safe distance from our village, was none the less terrifying.

In this most cruel war battles continued in the night as well as in the day. When time was asked by either army to remove the wounded, it was refused, because each mistrusted the motives of the other, thinking that, instead of removing the wounded, they would utilize the time thus gained in preparing for another attack.

About the first of September we went to Antwerp for a day or two. While on the train we saw the wires stretched from place to place, and heard explained the intended use of electricity at the fortress. Antwerp was at that time, still and peaceful, as a child who slumbered, feeling perfectly safe within her lines of fortifications. About eight o'clock in the evening every light had to be put out, and the place resembled a city of the dead.

On returning about twelve o'clock on Sunday, with the Sister who accompanied me, we found some wounded brought in,

who were pierced by bayonets at a short distance from our house. Their condition was critical, but they recovered sufficiently to be taken to Antwerp within the following week.

A day or two later, while crossing the yard, we suddenly heard that sissing, crackling sound of a shell or bomb flying through the air in the direction of the church spire which towered above the walls of the Convent chapel. Several others followed in quick succession. All the convalescent soldiers who were in the yard, the Sisters and ladies in the garden, hastened to take refuge in the cellars.

We feared for the wounded soldiers within, who could not leave their beds. Soon the attack was answered by a heavy volley from the fortress, and the cannonade continued until early next morning.

A day or two later one of the refugees visited the place where the cannonade of the fortress had swept the entire region as if a tornado had passed over it. On returning he related that parts of human bodies hung on the trees and filled the hedges.

When the danger became imminent, the older Sisters and those who were ill, or in any way disabled, were advised by the Rev. Superior to seek refuge in the more secluded mission houses of the Community, and to all who desired, permission was given to do the same, or to return to their families for the time being. This was done on account of the inadvisability of any one's remaining at the convent during a battle, since the buildings were in close proximity to the fortress.

Some of the Sisters packed their trunks and sent them to the homes of their families. This precaution did not avail much, as the families of many of our members had to leave their homes as refugees and probably lost all their personal property.

Although all were permitted to seek safety in other places, only the older members and two or three of the younger Sisters availed themselves of the opportunity. All save these gathered around the Superior and her assistant, and promised voluntarily to remain to the very last to assist in the care of the wounded, whose number increased

daily since the arrival of the second division of the Red Cross.

On several occasions spies were arrested in Willebroeck and taken away. Some were arrested in Brussels and Antwerp in the garb of priests. It was authoritatively reported that supplies of weapons and ammunition, among which was dynamite, were found in public buildings in Antwerp, carefully hidden away in the basements. This aroused distrust on the part of the Belgians for the resident Germans, whom they had always treated with the greatest confidence and respect.

The result was that all the Germans then in Belgium were expelled from the country and had to return to their own land. This was, indeed, a hardship for the unoffending resident Germans, whose homes for years had been in the cities and towns of this little kingdom.

We retired at a late hour one night amid the incessant booming of cannon. Scarcely were our eyes closed when some one passed in the dormitory and knocked at each door. "Ave Maria" was the quiet greeting. "Deo

Gratias," the response. "What is it?" was asked. "The Germans have entered and are crossing the bridge," was the reply.

With beating heart and trembling limbs, each sprang up and was dressed in a few minutes. In a state of great excitement, all stood in the hall ready to receive orders from the Superior, who had gone downstairs to make inquiries about the situation. At the first sound of the alarm a party of soldiers and their officer went out to ascertain the facts in the case, as the bridge where the enemy were said to be crossing was not far distant.

All the inhabitants of the village were on the alert. By the time the Sisters were ready to depart, the soldiers had returned, whose officer laughingly related that it was only a party of Belgian "Lanciers" in gray uniform, whom the Burgomaster of Blaesvelt had mistaken for German soldiers, and thought it his duty to spread the alarm.

All retired quietly to their rooms once more, but no one rested much the remainder of the night.

Then followed anxious days for the residents of Willebroeck, who expected momentarily to hear the alarm clock in the church tower give notice to flee for their lives. The officers of the Belgian army were very sanguine, and assured the Superior and those in charge of the wounded that timely notice would be given if the danger increased.

Nevertheless, the crackling of shells, the heavy cannonade from the fortress and field cannon, and the occasional proximity of those hostile aeroplanes, together with the reports of atrocities and destruction taking place around us, were fearsome in the extreme.

In striking contrast to the noise and commotion on all sides, was the calm tranquillity which reigned in the chapel. The Sacred Heart stretched forth that same Fatherly hand which assisted the apostle sinking on the Sea of Galilee. The altar was still and solitary, but the little red light flickered in the sanctuary lamp and told of Him whose word alone stilled the winds and calmed the angry waves.

In the circumstances which then existed, one would almost envy the dead resting so quietly in the old-time vault, in the shadow of the tabernacle.

Lights were forbidden after a certain hour, but the moon shone through the stained windows and wrought fantastic designs on the gilded molding, while the mild and peaceful looks which characterize the images of the saints told of heroism and victories won on the battle field of life, in the pursuit of peace and sanctity, and carried the mind to that future and better life where neither the pride, avarice, nor ambition of man can ever destroy the eternal peace, nor break the impregnable union of hearts.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE FLIGHT OF THE REFUGEES.

While the aforesaid events were taking place, sorrowful scenes were witnessed along the streets. Our attention and sympathies were particularly attracted to the flight of the refugees. In this case we could give no material assistance, as we were able to do in other cases.

For hours and days and weeks the doleful procession passed along the streets; a living stream made up of all ranks and classes of society. Here were seen the poor old farmer's household, whose sons had gone to the front; and young married women, with small children in their arms or by their sides, whose husbands had to don the soldier's uniform and go to the war. The sick, the old and the feeble were taken from their beds of suffering and, with shawls or blankets thrown over their shoulders, placed in carts or wagons and carried away, perhaps, to perish by the roadside. We have seen



cripples and small children hurriedly driven along the street in wheelbarrows.

Packages carried on their arms, on their backs, or in little carts were about all that the poor people could take, and all that they desired, so confident were they of a speedy return to their homes.

On another day about the end of August, the unbroken line which filed through the street at noon was, without any interruption, passing through at twelve o'clock that night. As the cities, towns and villages were, for the most part, taken by surprise, or bombarded without having received any notice, the civilians had no alternative but to collect a few necessary articles of clothing, and in some cases a loaf of bread, and flee in haste from their homes, leaving crops, cattle, furniture and all their possessions to the fury of the flames and the tide of destruction, so rapidly sweeping down upon them.

Many people of the wealthier class, anticipating what was to come, had packed trunks and boxes with clothing and other personal property and sent them away to what was considered safe quarters. Then

they moved away within the fortifications of Antwerp, where it was thought the enemy could not enter. Others, in the firm hope that the war would soon be over and that they would be able to return to their homesteads in a few days, left everything untouched and fled from city to village and from town to town. We met parties of acquaintances in Antwerp who had changed their places of residence nine times within one month, and then were obliged to leave Antwerp in a day or two.

Some let their cattle run loose in the meadows. These were shot down or taken by the soldiers, or appropriated by any one who desired.

It was most pitiful to see these poor people, whose only object was to get away as far as possible from the scenes of conflict. Some carried small loaves of bread; others had a little hay or straw in their wagons; some led a cow or two; others two or three pigs. In some of the carts we recognized faces of our former pupils, who only one short month before were longing for the pleasant vacation days. Their fathers or

brothers were in the army, and their homes forsaken. Some children had lost their parents and were crying piteously. When the Sisters left the parish church, where they daily took part in the public devotions for peace, they were besieged by hundreds of these poor, half-frantic refugees, beseeching shelter over night in the church or schools, which were already full to overflowing. The days were warm and pleasant, but the nights were very chilly and sometimes rainy. Where would those poor people go and what could they do without food or shelter for all those little children? The friendly stars looked down from the realms above upon thousands who lay along the roadside, while others crowded the barns and country schools, or made rude tent-like shelters in the bed of the new canal.

This canal would have been opened in September with great festivities, over which King Albert was expected to preside.

Peace or security was nowhere to be found. The war-chased people fled from place to place for weeks, fearful and famishing, until the kindly and protecting arms

of England and Holland received them, and the noble hearts and hands of American women united to provide food and clothing for those who fled, and for the others also who would not, or could not, leave their own country.

While cheerfully and gratefully testifying to what has been accomplished in this country, and the great amount of money spent in alleviating the sufferings caused by this sanguinary conflict, it does seem sad to think that American manufacturers will continue to supply weapons and ammunition to any of the belligerent countries. It reminds one of a great conflagration, in which the firemen exert themselves to subdue the flames, while a few pour on oil to replenish the fire. This will be a lasting reproach to those engaged in this destroying traffic. "There is no pocket in a shroud," and the bloodstained money obtained in this manner will not assuage the pain and grief of the orphan and widow, nor will it purchase redemption at the judgment seat above.

As the danger increased, difficulties in the way of traveling also increased. Passports, upon which were indicated the distinguishing characteristics of the bearer, had to be obtained before leaving one's place of residence, if only for one hour; and such passports could only be used in the vicinity in which they were issued.

To go to Antwerp, or any of the cities or towns at a distance, one's passport had to bear his or her portrait, sealed by the Burgomaster of the town or city wherein he resided. If these requirements were not complied with, a person would not be permitted to pass through the gate of a city or enter even an ordinary depot.

A great number of refugees found their way ultimately within the fortified City of Antwerp. They were seen for a day or two in solitary groups in the public park, or in tents along the streets. In a large school near the Palace of Justice fifteen hundred found refuge for a few days, and were then directed to leave.

The authorities, becoming alarmed about the food and water supplies of the city, and

fearing contagion or disease, compelled all refugees who were not obliged to leave their homes on account of fortifications, to leave the city within a specified time. Large numbers of these poor, homeless people, many of whom were of gentle birth and wealthy, were obliged to crowd into freight cars which had been used for the transportation of cattle, and were thus carried away to Ghent or Ostend. From Ostend they were shipped to England. Many had previously left Antwerp for Holland. In these countries thousands of them will prayerfully await the dawn of peace, which will decide the future destiny of their country.

The events already related occurred between the first of August and the 27th of September. Sunday, September 27, passed off quietly in Willebroeck, although refugees filed through the streets continually, and the booming of cannon was heard in the surrounding towns. The sky was leaden and a somber, smoky atmosphere hung over the country and caused a feeling of sadness and uncertainty.

In the evening one of the refugees returned from a hurried visit to the scene of his former home, and related to his daughter, who anxiously awaited his arrival, that the enemy had made great headway. "Tomorrow will be the last day in which it will be safe to remain in Willebroeck," said he to those who stood there.

In a few minutes the report was circulated on all sides. Sisters, on hearing it, remarked, "Nonsense! What God protects is well protected; we must not be alarmed, but patiently await the accomplishment of God's holy will." Monday's papers brought news of another bombardment of the City of Mechelen (Malines), a short distance from Willebroeck.

Following are a few quotations from that morning's paper (Antwerp's *Handelsblad*, Monday, September 28, 1914): "While on the train this morning, before entering the station of Mechelen, our attention was attracted by the multitudes who, in the greatest haste, took flight through the Zandpoortvest. They were the residents of Muysen. The German troops, about eight hundred

strong, were there at half-past seven; thus the people had no alternative but to take flight as rapidly as possible. The enemy shot upon some refugees, and the ten-year-old son of Desiré Horckmans was shot in the car where he was sitting, and Mrs. Arm Beulens was seriously wounded. 'This was only a sign of what was yet to come.'

"Scarcely had we reached the station, at half-past eight, when we heard the heavy roar of cannon, followed by terrific explosions, such as we had never before heard. All the people who had come from the direction of Antwerp took flight through the side streets. At every explosion it seemed as if an earthquake shook the ground under foot. So heavy were the shocks that many people fell.

"On the Schuttersvest, we found refuge in a cellar, while one volley followed another. The explosions were deafening. Every pane of glass in the vicinity was broken in pieces. In several places the stones were forced out of the pavements and thrown to a great distance, while bombs



pierced the ground to the depth of two meters.

"One can judge the terror in which the residents of Mechelen tried to find a place of safety. The cannonade was awful, as was also the 'Gesis' (sissing noise) of the bombs which flew over the streets and, exploding, spread fire, death and destruction in every direction.

"A bomb fell just in front of the railroad station, making a pit in the ground three 'meters' in diameter. The place was covered with stones, which were violently jerked out of the ground. The station is half-demolished. No one is there to be seen except the lifeless body of an elderly gentleman who, with his face to the ground, is stretched out on the floor of the waiting-room.

"The beautiful buildings belonging to the Little Sisters of the Poor, and many other noted buildings have been totally destroyed. Thus it was in the few places which we have visited. What will it be in other places? All the streets through which we passed were covered with glass and stones.

In all the city there is not a pane of glass which remains whole. All day long the Duffel highway was black with refugees, which makes us conclude that all Mechelen has taken flight."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RESULTS OF WAR.

Centuries ago, when Attila, known in history as the "Scourge of God," led his army of Huns through the fertile fields of Europe, we read that he gazed upon the ruin which he had caused his soldiers to perpetrate on all sides, and cried out, "I am the hammer of the world, the grass grows no more where my horse has trod."

Well may these same words be applied to the armed forces now dominating the devastated plains and meadows of what was once peaceful Belgium.

When one passes through the masses of falling debris and looks upon the remains of cities and villages which have stood for ages and in whose monuments and public buildings a more than human strength and beauty seemed enclosed, it appears that the Angel of Destruction has extended his deadly sceptre over the works of man and congealed those streams of life which once flowed through the streets now deserted and homes

made desolate by the unheard-of ferocity of civilized man.

When we try to estimate the amount of time, labor, wealth and industry required to build up these beautiful places, now stripped of their grandeur, devoid of life, and crumbling into dust, we become awestruck at sight of such desolation. The nothingness of the much-prized materialism becomes apparent in the ruins of man's grandest achievements, and involuntarily we are moved to cry out, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity," which the evolutions of time can change into dust and ashes.

Again the cruel hand of war is seen in the country homes, whose rustic beauty among the groves and green meadows so often aroused the spirit of song and fascinated the lover of Nature in his rambles. The churches whose cross-crowned spires, wherein the "Klokken" (chimes) so often pealed forth the call to prayer, are now abandoned, and their battered walls and broken windows look sadly down upon the deserted homesteads from which life has passed away.

The schools no more re-echo the gay sounds of children's voices, while the famishing little ones and their destitute parents are dying of hunger and privation or begging at the stranger's door. The colleges and libraries have delivered their volumes to the fury of the flames, and the withering blight has scorched the fresh verdure of those well-kept gardens and shady lawns where kings and princes dwelt.

Castles have been made into fortresses to conceal cannon and machine guns, while the deafening roar of exploding bombs replaces the gay music of ball and banquet room.

The red glow of the burning city illumines the evening sky and reveals in the darkness the ghastly spectres of partially demolished walls of the stateliest buildings which stand out amid the ever-increasing ruins.

War has desecrated the churches where angels knelt around the Holy of Holies, and where the daily Holocaust of Love, and the offering of praise and prayers perpetuated communion between earth and heaven. Have the angels left the altar at sight of the sacrilege committed in their presence, or

did they weep when the merciless bomb struck the house of God and wounded the worshipers there?

Behold the terror-stricken congregation leaving St. Rombout's Cathedral and taking flight through the streets of Mechelen, amid the falling walls and bursting pavements. Weeks later we shall meet them again as refugees in London, Leeds and Bradford, seeking food and shelter in the land of exile.

See that little coffin, less than two feet long! It seems so conspicuous, exposed there among the coffins of several soldiers who died that night in our hospital. This small casket contained the remains of a little angel about two months old, who was struck in the arms of her mother by a piece of exploded shell.

This woman had hurriedly left her home during the second bombardment of the city of Mechelen and, having run for some distance, sat down by the way to rest, when the fatal shell exploded, a piece of which mortally wounded the little one in her arms. Both were brought to our hospital that night and lovingly cared for until about

morning, when the innocent spirit fled to join the army of the blessed who inherit the realms of eternal peace.

Poor mother was left alone to bemoan the loss of her little one and to weep over her desolate home.

When one meets the ambulance wagons loaded with suffering, mutilated men who a few weeks before were sustaining heads of happy households; when one sees the dark red stream flowing from ghastly wounds and splashes of blood on all sides; when one observes the pallor of death on the strong man's face, while a comrade with tender pity bends over to obtain a last message for home; when one hears the despairing wail of orphan and widow; when one has watched the endless procession of terror-stricken refugees whose homes have become the prey of the cannon, when one hears repeatedly the sad experience of these exiles on their journeys from place to place, lying on hay or straw, in barns, in schools, on the bare ground, or in the basin of the empty canal, when one meditates on those perverse circumstances which have changed civilized

men into savage brutes—then we also agree that “The world has gone back a thousand years,” while a presentiment as of impending disaster passes over the earth and depresses each individual heart.

“Cast yourselves upon the knees and pray for victory,” cry out Christian monarchs to their soldiers, and, nevertheless, the God to whom they pray is witness to the wanton desecration of His churches and the wholesale destruction of life, liberty and property.

From the dark abodes of despair, the cohorts of satan seem to have taken possession of the world and filled it with vice and wretchedness, until it resembles the “abomination of desolation” referred to in Holy Writ.

To know what war is, it would be necessary to possess eyes to behold all the sin and vice; all the ruin and destruction; ears to hear every despairing cry and agonizing wail; a mind to comprehend all the misery and desolation, and a heart to feel the anguish in the heart of each suffering fellow-creature, from the moment the first shot was fired down through ages yet to come, until



the twilight of times, brighter in prospect, than the daylight of the present generation shall obscure the last shadows of the unholy conflict.

To realize what war really means, we should give consideration to the moral and physical degeneration of these sufferers and of their descendants; to the hatred, lust, passion, wilful murder and other high crimes against God and nature, engendered and committed, not in the moment of strong individual anger and passion, but as the result of a well-calculated plan, with profound forethought, called by some "strategy."

"War is justifiable only, if it is the necessary means for securing peace." (His Eminence, Cardinal Mercier.) May we humbly add, *then only as the last resort.*

## CHAPTER XIII.

### OUR DEPARTURE.

Monday, September 28, witnessed the scenes of sorrow and desolation in and around Mechelen and vicinity described in the foregoing chapters. Many of the residents of Willebroeck had already taken flight, and the others were preparing to leave.

The Sisters, wholly absorbed in their work for the wounded, and relying on the word of the Belgian officers, that timely warning would be given as to the necessity of departure, had as yet no idea of joining the throngs of refugees who continuously filed through the main street.

The shocks of the cannonade from the fortress caused the buildings to tremble on their foundations, while the ground under foot seemed agitated as by an earthquake. A large number of wounded soldiers had been brought in the night before, and three or four lay dead in the mortuary.

Our Sisters and servant maids, as also the generous women refugees of Willebroeck, continued their sickening task in the laundry. In wooden shoes they stood at those large cement tubs while suds and blood-dyed water streamed over the stone floor.

Since the cutting of the electric wires the motor which kept the machines in action could no longer be used for the laundry or for the bakery. This greatly increased the work in both places.

Large, vicious-looking black flies, before unseen in or about the place, probably attracted by the odor of blood, buzzed around in a most disagreeable manner.

The whole scene left an ineffaceable impression of sadness and horror at the unwonted ferocity of civilized man.

Night closed in again, but brought neither rest nor consolation. Fearing to retire, some of the Sisters remained in the chapel, while others spent the tedious hours of that dreary night in the refectory or adjoining rooms, and kept busy making surgical dressings for the wounded, of whom a larger number than usual had been brought into the hospital.

At intervals during the night the cannonade was heard, while the searchlights of the fortress penetrated the clouds on the lookout for the murderous Zeppelins. Morning came at last, with an increase of work and anguish. The enemy, with their usual determination, were trying to force their way through to Antwerp, while the Belgians were equally determined to prevent them, or to at least check their progress.

On Tuesday, September 29, the daily routine of the Convent took place as usual until noon, when the cannonade became terrific. A balloon, the meaning of which we did not know, had been sent up by the enemy. Some said it was to discover the position of the Belgians and, if possible, ascertain their strength. The Reverend Superior called upon one of the officers and asked if there was danger. "No," said he, "We shall let you know in due time."

Three Sisters, intending to go to Antwerp, sent a messenger to the station to ask when the train would leave. "No trains until evening," was the reply. They decided to wait until that time. Just then another

officer called for the Reverend Superior and said in an excited manner, "Weg van hier, aanstonds! Geen tijd te verliezen." (Away from here at once. No time to be lost.) This message flew from one to another, even to the terror-stricken hearts of the numerous wounded.

Impossible to describe the scenes which followed. In a few minutes a long line of motor cars came whirling up to the gate to take away the wounded who, some of them in an almsot dying condition, were being dragged out of their beds, dressed and hurriedly carried away to Antwerp, or to another place of refuge. One can never forget the look of anguish on some of their faces, while others seemed totally indifferent to all that was taking place around them.

There was one who was not indifferent. It was the wounded German officer who, as he himself admitted, had accomplished so much in the destruction of Louvain, and whose serious condition did not permit his being transferred with the first division of the Red Cross which left a short time before. He was sorely troubled when he

heard he had to leave, and would much rather have remained. He promised, in case the opportunity offered, to speak a good word for the Convent.

Did he survive or obtain his freedom, and thus have occasion to keep his word? We know not; but we do know that when the German soldiers were in possession of our Boarding-school, after the fall of Antwerp, our Superior and Sisters wrote that they had no complaint to make as to the conduct of those "Rynlanders."

The Sisters could hardly realize that they were obliged to leave their Convent home, for which they had toiled and labored for years, and which was as dear to them as the arms of a mother to her children; those schools which had so often re-echoed to the gay sounds of children's voices, as hundreds of them marched and sang in chorus; the garden where the white ducks were yet swimming in the pond; the fruit trees and flowers; in a word, all had to be left to the fire of the merciless bombs and shrapnels.

Several times they went back and forth; while it seemed preferable to remain and

take the risk than to go and endure the vicissitudes of pilgrimage and exile. But the command had to be obeyed, as the danger increased every moment.

About two o'clock three of us joined the crowds of farmers, country people and cavalrymen who were passing on their way to Boom. The other Sisters stood in the hall, ready to depart. We carried satchels and some small baggage, and walked to Boom, where we arrived safely at three o'clock. On the way we met a lady and gentleman who conversed fluently in English.

When we arrived at the station we learned that the train for Antwerp had left a few minutes before, and there would be no further transportation before evening. We went to the home of one of our Sisters in Boom and rested until five o'clock. Here we were joined by our Rev. Mother Superior and a large party of Sisters, who had left Willebroeck shortly after we did. Just as they had crossed the bridge of Boom, a bomb fell beside it and exploded, but did not injure the bridge. Our Sisters were on their way to Aertselaar, one of our missions

at some distance from the firing line. Rev. Father Somers, one of the assistant priests of Willebroeck, remained at his post in the village church during the bombardment of the town. Four Sisters had the courage to remain in the Convent when all the rest had left. They have written recently from Bristol, England, describing their experience amid the rain of bombs and shrapnel which fell that evening in the garden and around the buildings.

Bidding adieu to the Sisters who had joined us in Boom, we went to the railroad station about five o'clock in the evening, expecting to be in good time for the train to Antwerp. One of the Sisters sent a dispatch to her mother to send some one to meet us in the East Station when the train would arrive. As we approached the station in Boom, we met throngs of people coming back.

A lady told us not to go to the station, as no train would leave for Antwerp that night. Undismayed by the sad news, we passed those crowds of people and went right on to the station. The station-master was not at



liberty, so we stood there a few moments with a party of others in the waiting-room. A young lady of Boom, one of our former pupils, and one of the Sisters set out in search of a motor car or carriage. None could be obtained at any cost, not even a farmer's cart or wagon. All that could be used were in the service of the army.

From five o'clock until seven, the fruitless search continued, while the other two Sisters remained at the station in charge of the baggage. At seven o'clock one Sister returned with the good news that she had met the "Chef" of the First Division of the Red Cross ambulance which had remained in our hospital, and, having exhausted all the fine expressions in her French vocabulary, at last succeeded in sending him to the General of the Belgian Army, then in a restaurant in the city, to ask permission for the Sisters to enter the train of the Red Cross, which was at that time standing on the Antwerp Railroad, back of the depot.

A lady and gentleman of Antwerp, on hearing of our success, pleaded with tears in their eyes to have us ask permission for

them also to enter the train. Our youngest Sister, moved with compassion at the sorry plight of two fellow-creatures, made use of a stratagem in their favor. "Papa, Mamma," said she, when the "Chef" approached with permission for the Sisters to enter the train, "Papa, Mamma, carry our baggage into the train." The lady and gentleman took up the baggage in a hurry and the Sisters followed them into the train.

It was just seven o'clock when we entered the train of the Red Cross, which then stood waiting for the wounded soldiers. Unfortunately for us, the wounded had been taken to Antwerp in motor cars and our train remained standing at the depot.

The heavy cannonade had somewhat abated, but the field cannon were yet heard in several directions, and we feared a return of the Zeppelins which had been flying over Antwerp the week before. We were doomed to disappointment as to our departure from Boom. It was too late and decidedly dangerous to return to the home of our Sisters in the city, and a long night in this stationary train seemed unendurable.

At twenty minutes to twelve the "Chef" made his appearance once more and said that he had finally obtained permission to take the train to Antwerp; but we would be obliged to ride in the dark, very slowly, and arrive in a station at some distance from the usual stopping place. This depot was, nevertheless, known to the Sisters, who, if only safely in the city, felt sure of finding their way home. So the lights were turned out and the train started off. It was so dark that we could hardly distinguish the trees or buildings along the route.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ARRIVAL IN ANTWERP.

Shortly after leaving Boom, the sounds of war died out entirely, and one felt that there was at least one haven of safety in Belgium. About half-past one in the night we entered the Bassins, a station near the docks of Antwerp. We thanked the good "Chef" heartily and paid the station-master to accompany the party of five with a lantern to our destination. He did so, and on we walked the whole length of the Boulevard to the Palace of Justice.

Antwerp, the chief port of Belgium, the center of the railroad and canal systems, lay enshrouded in a cloak of darkness. Not the faintest glimmer of light was to be seen in the sky or on the land. Aside from this, there was not the slightest appearance of war, or of any disturbance whatever in the city.

At half-past two on Wednesday morning, September 30, hungry and utterly exhausted after the experience of the foregoing week,

we rang at the residence of Madame Broelinckx, mother of one of the Sisters of our company. This lady and her daughters received us with the greatest hospitality. They provided food and sleeping apartments, and left nothing undone to make our visit as pleasant and agreeable as could be under the circumstances. About three o'clock we retired for a few hours' rest, regardless of the dangerous Zeppelins which could have been flying over our heads. Next day we visited some of the magnificent churches in the city. These were filled to overflowing with pious worshipers at every service.

In the Church of the Jesuits, which we attended, it was difficult to find a seat, so great were the throngs who attended the evening devotions. The front seats were reserved for the convalescent soldiers, who attended in large numbers. It was so sad to see them. Some limped along on crutches; some with their broken arms in slings; while others had their heads and hands bandaged. Every door that opened or closed caused a shock, as if the bombs

and cannon balls had followed us from Willebroeck.

We had never heard more zeal in the sermons, more confidence in the prayers, or more fervor in the responses, in which the entire congregation joined. We shall never, never forget that week of prayer in Antwerp.

In such circumstances, when the courage is about to fail at the approach of an inevitable doom which no human power can resist, then will the most haughty and indifferent fall on their knees and pray.

A day or two after our arrival in Antwerp, in company with the Misses Broeclinckx, we visited the scenes of the Zeppelin raid which had taken place a few weeks before. It was sad to witness the damage done to those massive stone buildings. In some of them there was not a particle of glass to be seen in any of the window frames, while immense blocks of stone had been blown out of the walls. Bolts, knobs and bells were torn out of their places and the door demolished. One building looked as if it had been picked all over with a crow-

bar, while in some places pieces of the bomb had forced their way through the walls.

It was said in Antwerp that the bomb which fell back of the Bom street was aimed at the Palace of Justice, which is just at the corner of this street. It was also stated that the aim taken by the enemy in throwing this bomb was only one millimeter from being perfect. If so, it deflected the difference of a whole block before it reached the ground.

Either nine or eleven bombs were said to have been thrown by Zeppelins in Antwerp long before the bombardment of that city. Not one, however, reached its destination, and only damaged the buildings and killed or wounded a few innocent residents.

On returning we met two Sisters and a large number of orphan children, who left Willebroeck on the same day that we did. These Sisters, though similar to our own in some respects, had constant charge of the sick in the village hospital, which was founded and supported by the wealthy and charitable Lady of the Castle of Willebroeck, Madame De Naeyer. Besides a

number of invalids, there were about one hundred orphan children in this institution when the bombardment of the village began.

One of the Sisters said, that while carrying the invalids from their beds into the cellar, bombs were flying horizontally through the walls. One old woman was killed and another wounded. These two Sisters then departed with the orphans and knew not what had become of the others.

At the urgent request of our kind hostess, and also in hope of receiving news from Willebroeck, or from the Sisters with whom we had parted in Boom, we decided to remain over Sunday. The beginning of the following week passed uneventfully. One of our younger Sisters joined us during the week, but had little to relate, not having heard from Willebroeck since our departure.

Greatly desiring to hear something from the Convent, I resolved to ride over to Aertselaar with the milkmaid, as all the trains in this direction had ceased to run, and no other conveyance could be found. I went



down to the park with Miss Broelinckx and waited until the good woman had sold all her milk, after which I climbed into the little wagon and we rode hastily in the direction of the city gates. When but a few yards from the large green "port" or gate, while waiting a few moments at a store, we were overtaken by Miss Broelinckx, who had hurried after us to announce that she had met the Reverend Superior and a large number of Sisters, who had entered the city en route for Holland or England.

With unconcealed joy at the thought of meeting our Sisters again, I bade adieu to the milkmaid and retraced my steps back to the house where our friends were assembled. After lunch, complications having arisen as to their departure for England, the Sisters, about fifteen in number, decided to remain in the city for at least a few days. Some of them took up their residence with relatives, while the others found refuge in some of the convents in the city. It was arranged to hold a union meeting in a room adjoining the Jesuit Church, at which all were requested to be present, every day.

One of our party was quite despondent, owing to the fact that she had entirely lost track of her aged parents, who had left Mechelen during the bombardment of that city. A day or two later, while going to church, she had the pleasure of meeting her father on the street. He and his wife had come to Antwerp a few days before. They had found it necessary to change their place of residence nine times within one month. Mingled joy and sadness was felt a day or two later, when the Rev. Mother Superior visited the Sisters at the home of Madame Broelinckx and described the condition of affairs at Willebroeck.

With the Sisters whom we had left in Boom, she had gone to Aertselaar, where eight or ten of the older Sisters were staying. This town, quite a distance from the city, was considered perfectly safe. However, owing to the rapid approach of the enemy and the destruction of some of the fortresses, this place also became untenable. The City of Boom was evacuated and the bridge blown up a day or two after we left Willebroeck. Three days later all the ref-

ugees in Aertselaar were commanded to leave. This compelled the Reverend Superior to take the elder Sisters, some of them hardly able to walk on account of age and debility, to the City of Antwerp. With great difficulty she had found a rude conveyance of some kind and rode on to the "port" of the city. When they reached the large gate it was discovered that the passports were not in perfect order, consequently the Sisters were not allowed to enter.

Having found a resting-place for the others, Reverend Mother entered the city. After a short conference, she rode back to the Sisters and we saw her no more. While with us she told of her narrow escape at the Convent in Willebroeck the day after the Sisters left.

On September 30, having left her charges in safety in Aertselaar, she rode back again to Willebroeck, where three Sisters yet remained. The next day the cannonade was terrific.

## CHAPTER XV.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF OUR REFUGEE  
SISTERS.

Following is an extract from a letter which came to hand on March 15, 1915, from the four Sisters who remained in the Convent throughout the bombardment, two of whom are now in charge of the Belgian refugees in Bristol, England:

“As you already know, perhaps, three of us remained in our Convent when all the rest had fled. Later in the afternoon we saw the Reverend Director and his sister step into the doctor’s automobile and whirl off to a place of safety. Soon they were out of danger for the time being at least. That evening, following the advice of the Reverend Chaplain, we went to the Convent of the Presentation in Boom to pass the night. On the way we met Sister Michelle. When she heard that we had remained in Willebroeck, she came back with us. We were greatly pleased and took her along to Boom for the night. In the morning we

returned to our Convent in Willebroeck in an automobile of the ambulance. There was work in abundance. We had to cook and bake for one hundred and twenty persons. There were twenty priests with them. Besides these, there was scarcely any one left in Willebroeck. We rode to Antwerp for meat. Reverend Mother sent us word to come to Aertselaar to go with the other Sisters to England. We went to Aertselaar and asked permission to remain in Willebroeck. Reverend Mother rode back with us. Again, in the afternoon, there was nothing to be heard but cannonade on all sides. Just as the Reverend Superior was about to go to the chapel, she was called into the cellar, where the Sisters and some of the wounded had taken refuge. At once a heavy shock was heard. Every moment there were heavy shocks. Our chapel had been struck by a bomb, which destroyed the iron frame of the window, seriously damaged the wall and mouldings, shattered the pews and chairs, and filled all the adjoining rooms with lime and dust. We thought that our whole Convent stood in fire and

flame. All the window panes in the chapel were out. All the window panes in the front gable of the Convent were out. Reverend Mother, who had just escaped death by joining the others in the callar, returned to her charge in Aertselaar. We four remained in the Convent. The doctors assured us that if need be an automobile would be at our disposal in the evening.

Monday, October 5, the Chaplain, sent by the Major, came to tell us that we must leave. "Go," said he, "not to Antwerp, but through Flanders to England." We thought that our other Sisters had already gone to England. We remained Tuesday also, amid the thundering roar of the cannon. At six o'clock in the evening it was announced that the motor car was ready. "Rapidly," said they. "Everyone away." There we were! One in the kitchen and the others here and there at work. In haste we collected a few of our things, and, without food or other supplies, started on the way to Boom. The Belgian soldiers caused the bridge to spring just when we had crossed it. The two ladies of the Red Cross who had so faithfully

assisted in the care of the wounded, were with us. We went from Boom to Hemis-schen, over a rudely constructed bridge. From this place we jolted and pitched all night long. One of our number, utterly exhausted, slept soundly, and for the time being at least was unconscious of danger or difficulty. At ten o'clock on Wednesday morning we arrived at St. Niklaas.

We were well received by the Sisters at the Convent of the Presentation, and remained until next day. Then we went to Ostend. From ten in the morning until five in the evening we remained on the train and spent the night in a convent. We looked for the ambulance, and found it in the "Hotel Splendite," wherein we were given rooms overlooking the sea. There were about three hundred wounded soldiers brought from Antwerp, for that city was just bombarded. We remained there until the 13th of October. We had just retired on the evening of the 13th, when we were hastily called up. "Toe Zusters' gauw op! Ze zijn hier, alle maal bijna weg." (Sisters, do hurry up! Nearly all are away from here.) We

sprang up, dressed hastily, took our satchels and went directly to the depot. We stood in the waiting-room from eleven o'clock that night until five next morning. Two trains of wounded soldiers were passing. We succeeded in getting into one of them, and now "Ahead," wherever Divine Providence may lead us. That was a tiresome ride. Every few minutes the train would stop. Where were we going? Probably to France. In a town called Zarren we remained standing a long time. The residents brought food and drink for the soldiers and conducted the Sisters to a convent. We could not find sufficient words to praise and thank these good people; and now again, "Ahead to France."

We arrived in France at eleven o'clock in the night. The people were leaning out of their windows in their night-clothes and calling aloud "Vive la Belgique! Vive les Heros!" Again, "Ahead to Dixmunde." Here we were placed on a merchant ship, with one thousand wounded soldiers and ambulanciers from Antwerp. We knew not where we were going. There was no food. We slept in a small cabin containing



four berths, two above and two below. Those best exercised in gymnastics could climb into the upper beds. A few moments later the two younger Sisters had flown into their "Doves' Nest." The ship departed, and finally we arrived in Dover, England. We left Dover and went to Southampton, where we arrived safely on Friday morning. Here the wounded soldiers were taken to hospitals in the city, and we were conveyed to a convent. After a few days we were requested to go to Bristol to teach the Belgian children, and here we are at present among these good English people, where we may possibly remain until the refugees return to Belgium."

A letter from our Sisters in Holland last winter states that those members of the Community who had taken up their abode in the mission-house of Aertselaar were obliged to leave and take flight a few days later than we. Some of them endured great hardships along the route.

The Sisters whom we left in the city wrote about the same time the following:

“Our stay in Antwerp was short. We were told that it was dangerous to remain near the Palace of Justice. At six o'clock two of us started to the Touwstraat (Rope street), so as to be near our other Sisters. As the street cars had ceased to run, we had to walk about three miles. The Sisters who were in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in Antwerp, could no longer remain, as those nuns also were preparing to leave. It was impossible to close our eyes during that terrible night on account of the thundering, deafening explosions of cannon, while bullets, shells and shrapnel were flying over the city.

“Early in the morning we were ready to leave Antwerp, but our older Sisters could not walk, and we had also in our company a sick Sister from Londerziel. Finally, about eleven o'clock, we left for the station. We could hardly get through because of the crowd and the great number of wagons. Two of us walked on and arrived in Capellen at three o'clock. At the station we had to get into a wagon which had been used for the transportation of cattle, and then away

again. At half-past four we were in Calmpthout. We waited in the station from half-past nine until four o'clock. Finally we obtained a place in a coal car and set out for Holland.

"In Esschen, near the boundary line, we stepped off and walked forth to Hoogerheide, in Holland, where thirty of us will remain in a convent. I had forgotten to say that four of our Sisters took flight from Antwerp at one o'clock in the night.

"Here in Holland we are eating rye bread and mashed potatoes, passing the night on straw beds stretched upon the floors, and are quite at our ease, for the present at least."

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE EXODUS TO ENGLAND.

All the Sisters who had arrived at Antwerp met in conference several times during the week; but no final course of action could be decided upon, owing to the danger and uncertainty which, like dark, ominous clouds, cast a pall over the city and presaged disaster.

One afternoon two of us called on His Eminence, Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen, who, since the bombardment of his city and the destruction of his residence, had remained at times in rooms near the Cathedral of Antwerp. His stately countenance was calm and peaceful, notwithstanding the trials and overwhelming sorrows he had endured. We could hardly control our feelings when the fatherly hand of this good and faithful shepherd was raised to bless us for the journey and undertakings we had in view.

On Saturday, October 10, we met in conference for the last time in the Jesuit rooms

in Antwerp. Our Sisters had no idea of leaving the city at that time. The last advice of our Reverend Director before leaving was "Observe well the regulations, be ever true to God and duty, and let no day pass without doing some good work." He is dead now, having peacefully passed away on the night of December 24, 1914, shortly after returning to his former residence in Willebroeck. Although an invalid for years, he was an example of perfect zeal and accuracy in the performance of every duty. He was noted as an author of hymns and poems, and left many important works on Church and Bible history.

Requiescat in pace (rest in peace).

Having parted with our Sisters on the street in front of the church, in company with Miss Broelinckx, I went at once to the docks of Antwerp to make arrangements for crossing over to England. About noon on that day a flag was hoisted on the lofty spire of one of the great churches, denoting "Antwerp in danger." In a short time the whole city was panic-stricken. People carrying large and small bundles were seen hurrying

through the streets. At noon the signal was removed and confidence restored. At the docks we found that the last passenger boat was just ready to leave on her final trip and could accommodate no more, being then full to overflowing.

Three different times we returned to the docks, but found no means of departure. Even the small merchant boats were overloaded. Finally, on Monday, October 12, I found a place on a small boat, which seemed fit for sailing on an ordinary creek. There were about sixty or seventy refugees on board. I then bade farewell to the beautiful plains of Belgium, to the Sisters and acquaintances in whose company we had passed so many happy and peaceful years; farewell to the Convent home, where we had learned the one true way to that perfect peace, which neither the storms of time nor the adverse fortunes of war can destroy; farewell to those dear little pupils who daily attended school, the remembrance of whose cheerful, innocent faces inspirit the days of exile, as does the cool, fresh fountain, the weary, way-worn traveler.

Could this parting be final? No! a thousand times no! We shall meet again when these trials are over. The Belgians are a courageous people. Their country will rise from its grave of ashes; her exiled children will return; her cities will stand up from their ruins and flourish as they have never done before, and when Kings and Kaisers have become a memory, Sisters will be found at the bedside of the dying, and in the schools to teach the little children, and offer refuge to virtue and innocence within the Convent walls.

We took our places on the deck of this little boat at one o'clock. The deck was not covered in any manner, and there were seats for about half of the number of passengers; but we crowded together as best we could, with a certain feeling of security, for we all knew that within a few hours we would be safely out of reach of those terrible bombs and shrapnel, and we had a firm belief that our friends in Antwerp would also succeed in finding a place of safety.

We had just left the docks bound for Flushing, Holland, when the rain began to

fall in torrents and a heavy wind came up. We huddled together under the few umbrellas and tried to have patience with our steamboat and the weather. One young lady, in the act of looking around, had the unspeakable chagrin of seeing her umbrella snatched out of her hand by the wind and carried away down the tide. A large ship at some distance, seeing the strange-looking object on the wave, rapidly approached, lowered a boat, and immediately the umbrella was taken on board.

About three o'clock we were out at sea. There was no land to be seen. The wind grew stronger every moment, and our little boat rose and fell, pitched and rolled, in a most alarming manner. Being on the open deck, in the piercing cold wind, kept most of us from an attack of seasickness. Some of the Belgian women, who had never been at sea before, were nearly frantic with terror, and no wonder, for it was certainly a heavy sea for such a small boat. How delighted we were when the lights of Flushing, like so many stars reflected in the sea, began to gleam in the distance. When we



entered the harbor the wind ceased and the waves settled down into a calm, dark, lakey surface.

Unfortunately, we had no opportunity of seeing much of this noted summer resort, as it was quite dark when we left our little boat and stepped into a large, pretty looking Mall boat, which carried passengers to and from England.

After supper in the neatly furnished dining-room, we retired to our cabin. We considered ourselves at a safe distance from the firing line, and anticipated a good night's rest. In this we were sadly disappointed. Scarcely had we closed our cabin door, when the ship's crew began to load the boat with her cargo, and the unendurable noise continued all night long. One old lady, who had suffered greatly in coming over from Antwerp, began to scold at everybody and everything, then laughed heartily, turned over in her berth and tried to rest.

Morning dawned, at last. The rain had ceased and the sun was shining brightly. We expected a pleasant voyage over to Folk-

stone, England. Again we were disappointed. Fearing the mines which might have been encountered on the usual course, our boat had to take another route. Instead of a pleasant trip of three or four hours, we had a voyage of nine hours. On this occasion there was no chance to escape the seasickness. The sea was rougher here than in some places on the Atlantic ocean. Heavy waves dashed against our little boat and caused her to roll and pitch terribly, while a cold, penetrating wind swept the deck like a hurricane.

Some of us became so greatly indisposed that we were advised to go on deck. We did so and stood grasping the railing for an hour or two. Everyone was ill. While on deck we sighted something projecting from the sea, but could not clearly distinguish the outline. It proved to be a submarine; at any rate, we were told that it was; but our boat managed to keep at a safe distance and hastened forth unmolested.

A short time afterward we were signalled by a warship. All action in our boat ceased. The warship drew near and was soon along-

side of the Mallboat. An officer came on board to ask if there were soldiers among the passengers. Having received a negative answer, greetings were exchanged and the warship departed, greatly to the satisfaction of all on board. Having lost about half an hour, our steamer forged ahead again at full speed.

About three o'clock, benumbed with cold and indisposed, we staggered to the gangway and were assisted downstairs, where we tried to rest for a time. About five o'clock in the evening the hills and rugged banks of England made their appearance. At six o'clock we entered the harbor of Folkstone. Everyone was obliged to show his or her passport and undergo the doctor's examination. This occupied just an hour. Happy to again set foot on "terra firma," we hastened to the train, which stood waiting to take us to London, a ride of two or three hours. In the meantime darkness had closed in and we saw nothing outside of our compartment until after nine o'clock, as we approached the suburbs of London.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LONDON AND LEEDS.

One of the first things to attract attention, as we approached the city, was the double-decked street car. It was so strange to see the people sitting in those box-like cases, up on top of the car. From appearances, one would think this kind of conveyance in danger of tipping over at every turn of the street.

A little before ten o'clock we steamed into Victoria Station, London, and immediately made our way to the office of the Relief Committee, who kindly exchanged our Belgian money for English currency and gave us cards to the Premier Hotel, Southampton Row, Russel Square, London.

The Belgians who came to England on this occasion were people of the wealthier class, who paid their own expenses and were free to take rooms or lodgings where they desired; while a great many others who came over at the expense of the Relief Committee were obliged to accept what was as-

signed them and remain where they were sent until transferred by the Relief Committee.

When all of us met at table in the Premier Hotel, it was quite difficult for the Belgians to make themselves understood. Fortunately, one of the party, being familiar with the two languages, acted as interpreter until each obtained what he or she desired, and the regulations and requirements had been explained.

At half-past eleven all retired to their rooms for the night with feelings of heartfelt gratitude to the good God, who led our steps through so many trials and dangers to a place of peace and safety.

In the morning the whole party attended Mass at eight o'clock in a large church on Southampton Row, and returned to the hotel for breakfast at half-past nine. In the dining hall we met another party of Belgians, among whom were Sister M. Aloise and her family, Mr. and Miss Erix, of Wilbroeck, and the Burgomaster of Mechelen (Malines) and his wife. The Sisters, not having seen each other in several weeks,

had a long and pleasant visit. After dinner we called on the American Relief Committee and obtained the loan of money necessary for the trip to America. The American Government had made arrangements with its committee to assist in this way American citizens stranded in the belligerent countries. It was given in exchange for a note for the required sum, payable on demand to the United States Treasury after the first of January, 1915. Interest on this note was not exacted.

This action on the part of the American Government, in assisting her stranded citizens who found themselves unable to secure funds at a time when it was impossible to communicate with or receive assistance from friends, was highly praised by prominent Europeans, and deeply appreciated by the Americans themselves.

The important places which we had an opportunity of seeing during this short stay in London were the Tower of London, so noted in English history, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, and also the beautiful new Westminster Cathedral,

Which seems to resemble Westminster Abbey in its mode of construction.

While at the station I sent a dispatch to relatives in Leeds to meet me there at the depot next day, after which we returned to the Premier Hotel for another night. This night, October 15, seemed very long, as I was anxious to proceed on my journey as rapidly as possible. Next morning found the city enwrapped in a heavy "London fog." The streets were very dusty, the air chilly, and the mist so dense that it was impossible to read the names on the buildings across the way.

The streets and thoroughfares of London were so crowded at times that it seemed impossible to pass through. Teams, carriages, street cars, motor cars and pedestrians thronged hither and thither, each with some particular aim or object in view.

Not a single thought of death seemed to occupy their minds, although death could have befallen hundreds of them at every turn of the street. All were in a hurry, for, as a rule, people do not walk in England, they run, which, by the way, impressed me

as unusual, considering the fact that the country appears to be very hilly and many of the streets run up or down high hills.

Policemen stand in the middle of the streets at the crossings and keep back the crowds on one side until they have passed on the other.

On all sides placards were posted on the gates and walls calling for recruits to the army. Whole companies of these were seen in citizens' dress marching away to the barracks.

During a very short but pleasant stay in England our attention was often attracted by the zeal of the English woman, working for their absent countrymen. Every spare moment was employed for this purpose. On the train, in the street car, or walking along the streets, her deft fingers were ever busy knitting for some poor soldier at the front.

The prayers of thousands of those poor victims freezing in the trenches during the past two winters will call down blessings upon these busy workers, not only in England, but in our own dear country also; and all over



the world where this charitable work is undertaken.

On Thursday evening, October 15, I took leave of our numerous Belgian companions and departed alone on the long and tedious journey to Leeds, where I arrived at the appointed hour and was met at the station by relatives, with whom I started at once for their residence.

We enjoyed two or three days of pleasant weather in this busy manufacturing city, and visited some of the churches and places of special interest. The busiest place in the city was, probably, the American penny store. Here it was that the Star-spangled Banner gladdened the heart of any American who happened to pass that way and stop for a penny's purchase. Except on Sunday, this immense building was said to be crowded every day in the week, and on Saturdays it was hardly possible to pass through because of the throngs of people who filled it from morning till evening.

One remarkable feature about the city of Leeds is the deep dark color of the exterior of nearly all the buildings. The Cathedral,

the City Hall, the Museum, and even the statue of Queen Victoria, on the square in front of the City Hall, are of such a dark color that one would suppose them to be built of black stone. This is probably caused by the fogs, and smoke from the numerous factories. The fog becomes so dense in the fall and winter that the street cars are said to collide, and other accidents occur at times owing to the impossibility of distinguishing objects even at a short distance. When but a few days in Leeds, my attention was attracted by an article in the morning paper announcing the expected arrival of five hundred Belgian refugees in the city.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE REFUGEES IN ENGLAND.

As a good and loving mother would receive her own weary, way-worn children, so did England and Holland open their arms to receive, console, assist and provide for the destitute, war-chased people of Belgium. These unfortunate refugees, the homeless and penniless exiles from a once free and happy country, have been welcomed to the shores of England with a true Christian charity and hospitality, which excites our admiration.

The gates of her manors, the doors of her castles, the dwellings of her citizens, have opened wide to harbor the throngs of refugees who entered her seaports in search of food and shelter. Great numbers went to London and were received in the Alexandria Palace, where on one occasion about three thousand were said to have attended the Divine sacrifice of the Mass and were addressed in their own language by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Dewachter, Vic. Gen. to His

Eminence Card. Mercier. of the Archdiocese of Mechelen. In this palace they were received and cared for temporarily. Later they were distributed in groups to the different towns and cities of the country in accordance with the means of accommodation afforded by the respective places.

Belgian Relief Committees were established in all the localities about to receive refugees. These were made up of a number of ladies and gentlemen, both Catholic and Protestant, of the wealthier class of English society. The Lord Mayor of the city, and mayors of the towns and villages, took the work of these committees under their special supervision. They were present at the arrival of the refugees and delivered addresses of welcome. The Lady *Mayoress*, by her presence and example, often assisted and encouraged the ladies in the clothing department, and when time permitted drove around to visit the Belgians in their new homes. All the ladies and gentlemen of the relief committees were regarded as honorary members and received no compensation for their services.

It is impossible to describe the amount of care, labor and anxiety, not to speak of the time and expense, which these good people encountered in this new field of labor. "I have not had two hours' rest any night since the work began," said Alderman C—, a member of the Bradford Committee, a few days before our departure. The same remark could well have been made by all the members, who devoted their whole time and energies to the work in hand.

The relief committees were obliged to make arrangements for the reception and temporary lodgings of the refugees; also for their wearing apparel and food supplies, because many of them had left their homes with the same clothing which they wore at their ordinary work, and had no other garments with them. Arrangements had to be made with the vicars, or ministers of the Protestant parishes, and with the lords of the manors and castles, as to the permanent dwellings and food supplies of these people during their stay in England; and, to avoid confusion, all had to be in readiness upon the arrival of the refugees, who were sent in

large numbers from Alexandria Palace, London. In less than three weeks over fifteen hundred had been received in Leeds, Bradford and Keighley.

When a party of refugees was expected, the whole city, it may be said, turned out to welcome them. The streets from the station to the City Hall, where they usually lodged for a few days, were thronged with curious spectators, long before the appointed hour. They not only filled the streets, but climbed upon every available vantage point in order to see the Belgians. Some little boys had found a place on the pedestal of the statue of Queen Victoria and sat there quite contentedly. Lines of motor cars stood waiting at the station, while the police had great difficulty in keeping back the crowds, who threatened to crush each other in their eager desire to get near the platform.

The first party, over five hundred in number, which was received in Leeds, was expected one evening at five o'clock. Being detained in London, they did not arrive until about twelve o'clock, and yet that im-

mense multitude remained waiting on the street. The danger and inconvenience which await strangers, unaccustomed to the habits and language of a foreign country was anticipated, precautions being taken by the Lord Mayor and Relief Committee for the purpose of protecting these people, who were regarded as the guests of the nation. Two armed policemen kept unbroken watch at the entrance to the reception hall, and no one was permitted to enter who was not in some manner connected with the work of the Relief Committee. They were required to have cards of admission themselves. Though not obliged to do so, all those connected with this work wore the Belgian colors.

Two Little Sisters of the Poor of England and a Sister from Belgium, who acted as interpreter, were requested to remain on guard in the woman's department during the night, while a policeman performed the same duty in the men's part of the building.

When the refugees reached the station, they were received by members of the Relief Committee, and while the cheers and

greetings of the assembled multitudes resounded on all sides, they were taken in motor cars to the City Hall or other public building, where a bounteous supper awaited them. Food was abundant. There was soup and meat; bread, butter, fruit and preserves, with plenty of coffee, and boiled milk for the little children. How the refugees did enjoy this good meal, the first which many of them had tasted since they left their own homes in Belgium.

An address of welcome was then delivered by the Lord Mayor of the city, which was translated into the Flemish language, and responded to by one of the several Belgian priests who were resident pastors in England, and who met the refugees at the station, or came to the City Hall for this purpose.

After supper, all retired as quickly and quietly as possible. A sufficient number of mattresses, sheets, blankets, pillows and shawls had been provided by the wealthy residents. The mattresses were stretched out upon the floors of several large rooms, about a foot apart, and there the beds made



up. A separate room was arranged for mothers with small children. Some of these little ones were so ill and tired that they cried all night long.

One child was only seventeen days old. He was born in Alexandria Palace, and, being the first Belgian born on English soil, received the name of Albert George Alexander, and the gift of a beautiful silver watch from an English princess, with his royal name engraved upon it. One poor woman told of having kept her child, three months old, from starving by giving it sugar with water from the ditches along the route. Truly no distinction was here to be observed between rich or poor, high or low class of people. All were grateful to receive the lowly place of rest offered on the floors of the museum, with the costly paintings on the walls around them. A poor old woman was suffering from asthma and was taken to the Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor, where in a few days she was found to be in a dying condition.

Next morning we took some food to a gentleman about eighty-five years old, who,

with his wife and adopted daughter, had fled from St. Rombout's Cathedral during the bombardment of the City of Mechelen. He had been the proprietor of a large iron foundry in that city, and in his business had amassed a considerable fortune. As his health began to decline, he sold the foundry and bought fifteen houses to rent. Because of the unexpected attack on the city he was obliged, with many others, to take flight, not having had time to return home for money, clothing or even a handkerchief. He was very ill with bronchitis, and was also taken to the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Next morning many of the refugees attended Mass in the nearest Catholic Church, after which they returned for breakfast at eight o'clock. The tables were well supplied with bread, butter, coffee, fruit, preserves and crackers, or small cookies. After breakfast discourses were delivered to the assembled Belgians, explaining the customs and habits of the country in which they were about to reside, and instructions and information given. At the close of this address the work of registration, which, in some

cases was begun the evening before, was continued. The names and residences, the number of members in each family, the daily occupation of each and other particulars were carefully recorded, special care being taken to keep all the members of families and relatives in groups together.

One thing which occasioned great anxiety to nearly all the refugees was the fact that some member, and in a number of cases several members, of their families was missing. In these cases the relief committees advertised in the newspapers, making public the names and former residences of the missing parties, and thus sought in every manner to obtain information regarding them. In many cases they were successful, greatly to the joy of the refugees.

A woman from the vicinity of Antwerp aroused the special sympathy of all who met her. She, with her husband and several children, in company with other refugees, left Antwerp on a train bound for Holland. Several Belgian soldiers were also on the train. During the journey they were fired upon by the enemy. The engineer sprang

from the locomotive and ran away. Many of the refugees rushed out of the compartments and, panic-stricken, sought refuge wherever a place of safety could be found. Almost at the same moment one of the soldiers then on the train, who was himself an engineer, sprang into the locomotive, and the train started again on its way to Holland. This all occurred in a few moments. In the confusion which took place when the train was fired upon, this woman's daughter, aged thirteen, unobserved by her parents, had jumped off the train with the others and was left in Antwerp, while the parents and other children were hurried off to Holland, and from Holland to England, having no opportunity to obtain information regarding their lost child.

While the refugees remain at those ancient homesteads, the proprietors have taken upon themselves the responsibility of providing everything needed in the line of food and clothing, the Belgians being required only to prepare their own food and to do their own work. This situation was somewhat trying for the wealthier class, who

were in no way accustomed to ordinary labor. In each locality some one was appointed to take the refugees to the nearest Catholic church until they became familiar with the streets and knew the way themselves.

Through the zeal and generosity of the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bradford, and prominent members of the Relief Committee in Leeds and Keighley, who not only gave us the use of their motor cars several times, but also, when not engaged, accompanied those who visited the refugees, we had the satisfaction of calling upon many of the Belgians in their new homes. This courtesy afforded us also a good opportunity of seeing and admiring those stately old castles and the lovely groves and grounds which surround them.

We saw the remains of the old Kirkstall Abbey, there in the valley among the hills of Yorkshire.

On a brass tablet in the chapter house is found the following inscription:

## THE CITY OF LEEDS.

*"Pro Rege et Lege."*

## KIRKSTALL ABBEY.

This Abbey was founded by Henri de Laci, Baron of Pontefract, in the year 1147. It was first established at Barnoldswick,

in Craven, by the Cistercian Order of Monks. In the year 1152 the monks removed from Barnoldswick to Kirkstall, and on the present site erected a temporary church. The present church and claustral buildings were completed during the life of the first abbot, who died in the year 1182.

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This Abbey was surrendered to the Crown at the Dissolution of Monasteries, on November 22nd, 1539. The Abbey and part of the adjoining lands were acquired from the representatives of the late

EARL OF CARDIGAN,  
Colonel J. T. North,

a native of Leeds, and presented by him to the Corporation of Leeds in the year 1889, during the mayoralty of Alderman John Ward, J. P., to be held in trust for his fellow-citizens as a place of public resort and recreation forever.

The Works of Preservation were completed by the Corporation in the year 1895, during the mayoralty of Alderman Peter Gilston, J. P.

As a skeleton protruding from a grave of the past, so appears the empty frame of this ancient structure. The church-like form of the chapel, where the monks of old chanted the divine Office and said their daily pray-

ers; the old, crumbling belfry, where the doves coo and wild birds make their nests; the altar, the refectory and other apartments within, are yet clearly distinguishable. But the storm winds, howling through the frameless doors and windows, awake the echoes of those voices long hushed beneath the ruined walls, and recall another period of war, when the destroying flames desecrated this hallowed shrine as do now the bombs and shrapnels the institutions of Continental Europe.

This is one of the most noted of those ancient ruins, and arouses the interest and admiration of all tourists who visit this part of England.

On another afternoon we were shown through an old but well-preserved castle of the seventeenth century, whose low ceilings, stretching out over the spacious halls and parlors, heavy black mouldings and ornamentation form a striking contrast to the design, structure and decoration of the present age. The lady proprietress of this handsome manor was to be seen with the white cap and apron of a nurse, walking to and

from her castle, in the service of the refugees.

The pretty rural names given these old homesteads, such as Oakwood, Laurel Grove, Ambleside Avenue, Arnos Vale and many others, lend them another charm and give a romantic touch to their beauty.

While the scenes witnessed among the refugees were, for the most part, sad and depressing, nevertheless a little incident occurred which touched the mirthful chord in our poor human nature, and afforded us the rare pleasure of a good hearty laugh.

One afternoon during the last week of our visit in England a message was received from members of the Relief Committee in Bradford, asking for an interpreter to come to the assistance of some refugees at Oakwood, whose affairs had become complicated. Two of us set out immediately and arrived at the office of the Relief Committee to hold a conference on the subject. It was decided to visit Oakwood at once and make a thorough investigation of the case. A party of three or four ladies, led by the Hon. Mr. D——, of the Relief Committee,



arrived in a motor car at the entrance to the lovely manor of Oakwood just as the heavy branches of the ancient oaks had succeeded in closing out the last rays of the setting sun.

Mr. D—— advanced with a firm determination to make short work of the matter and settle the difficulties with one good bang of his big cane. He entered the portal, followed by the ladies, and stood a moment before the beautiful plate-glass doors, through which the light of the hall lamp was reflecting in all the colors of the rainbow on the oak carvings of the outer doors. Not finding the bell, he tapped gently on the door with the top of his cane. Again and again this act was repeated, but no response came, although voices inside were distinctly audible.

Becoming quite impatient, Mr. D—— lifted his cane and struck the door one or two resounding blows, which were calculated to attract the attention of the indifferent people within. A deathly silence ensued for a few moments, and then a chorus of women's voices began to cry out, "Call the police! Call the police! 'Tis burglars! What do they mean by coming here and breaking

down our doors? One old lady approached the door and asked: "Who is there, and what do you want? We're frightened almost to death. Is that the way to do, to come and pound on the door in that manner?" By this time Mr. D——had succeeded in making himself heard, as he answered in a tone of sincere sorrow, "I beg pardon, ladies, I really beg pardon. I meant no harm. I meant no harm at all." By this time the door was partially opened and three panic-stricken old ladies appeared within, while Mr. D——, with his hat in one hand and the offending cane in the other, was bowing most meekly and making elaborate excuses to the ladies, who, seeing the humble attitude of the supposed burglar, ceased to call for the police and were disposed to answer any reasonable question.

"Will you be kind enough to lead us to the Belgian refugees?" asked Mr. D——. "But," said one of the ladies, "there are no Belgians here. You've made a mistake. The refugees are living in the castle yonder on the next manor."

Thanking these good ladies for the information, and again begging pardon for intrusion, we left the portal with more humble feelings than when we entered and proceeded to the next castle.

The trouble here originated between two parties of Belgians who, on account of language (the one spoke French, the other Flemish) and whose political views were intensely antagonistic while yet in Belgium, were unable to agree. Some slight changes were made by the Relief Committee and all dissension ceased.

Next morning a dense fog enveloped the entire landscape. The damp, chilly atmosphere seemed to penetrate every nook and corner, and on the streets, at a few yards distance, objects were scarcely visible. Some necessary preparations were made for the long-anticipated voyage to America, and then we patiently awaited the rapidly approaching steamer *St. Paul*, on her way to Liverpool.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## HOMEWARD BOUND.

Saturday, October 31, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a mixed assembly met on the pier in Liverpool and gazed, with not a little apprehension, at the roily waters of the harbor and the ever-increasing clouds of mist.

The *St. Paul*, while not one of the largest or most pretentious of the American steamers, is by no means the least. Nineteen years ago she passed us in mid-ocean, although she had left New York three days later than we. Her parlors, refectory, and even the berths, are exceedingly neat and comfortable. The dining-room is particularly attractive. One thing especially noticeable on this ship is the absence of all disagreeable, smoky or gaseous odors, which on some steamers taint even the best-prepared viands, and often cause a feeling of nausea the moment one enters the gangway.

May her patron, the good *St. Paul*, who on earth had taken so many perilous jour-

neys on land and sea, ever watch over his graceful white sea-bird and lead her safely into the wished-for harbor.

Promptly at five o'clock the gong, sounding through the gangway, gave notice of departure. For an hour or two we stood on deck and gazed out upon the rapidly retreating lights of Liverpool, casting their rays so awkwardly through the heavy fog which decked both land and sea.

When the last light fades out on the shore and despondency overwhelms poor human nature, exposed to the unseen dangers of the deep, then confidence is restored by the thought that we are ever in the presence of Him whose watchful eye never closes, and without Whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground.

#### CONFIDENCE.

God is on the sea,  
 As well as on the land,  
 Since all the mighty powers that be  
 Are resting in His hand.

He who gently moves the deep,  
 And holds the firmament above,  
 Will His people safely keep,  
 Who are trusting in His love.

He who rules the swelling wave,  
When the storm is raging nigh,  
Can our tortured spirits save  
From His Throne of Grace on high.

And should the angel, Death,  
Spread his wings above the wave,  
Then our last, our dying breath,  
Must be: Save! Oh Jesus, save!

Grant us Thy celestial joy  
In the realms of love and light,  
Where no toils, no cares annoy,  
The just one, in Thy sight.

Bring our spirits home to Thee,  
Where the angels' joyous band,  
Far above the deep, dark sea,  
'Round Thy throne forever stand.

Before concluding, it may not be out of place to refer particularly to the noble feelings of fraternal charity which existed among the English people, not only in regard to the Belgians, whom they so generously received and housed, but also with respect to their conduct toward their Catholic fellow-citizens engaged with them in this charitable work. We heard no more of those petty enmities which so often had arisen in times past as to race, creed or nationality. The Catholic priest and Prot-

estant minister worked side by side in this good work. Ladies of every denomination united their efforts and offered their time and money for the sole purpose of helping the needy. No compensation was expected, no material gains to be obtained. Thus every work performed was a work of perfect self-sacrifice, and deserved a greater reward than earth can repay. A golden link in the chain of love will ever more unite the hearts of England and Belgium.

Further experience has shown that these golden links have multiplied until the chain extends across the Atlantic, and holds in its friendly tangles the heart of America also; who, of her rich abundance, has dealt out to Belgium the clothing and life-giving foodstuffs which during the past two years have saved the country from famine.

When this period of anguish is over and historians are recording for future generations the horrors of this awful conflict, may they also give just praise to the All-wise Being who has caused the fragrant rose of charity to bloom among the weeds of war.

We were, or seemed to be, far out in the Irish Sea before we could tear ourselves away from that wonderful sight. The sea was as yet quite calm, and a number of hungry seagulls were flying around as if to bid us a last farewell; so we remained on deck until it was found necessary to enter and make arrangements for the night.

We were sadly disappointed on that dismal Hallow E'en in not being able to obtain a glimpse of our own dear little Emerald Isle, so near and dear, and yet so far away.

Next morning, Sunday, Feast of All Saints, found us out in the deep waters of the channel, but the sea still remained calm. At half-past seven o'clock we assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, offered up in one of the ship's parlors.

When the service was ended we returned to our rooms, where in a few hours we were all undergoing severe attacks of seasickness.

When again we walked the deck it was to inhale the invigorating salt sea breeze and admire the wondrous waste of waters with the clear blue sky above, and in the depths



reflected a most beautiful picture, "Sunset on the Sea."

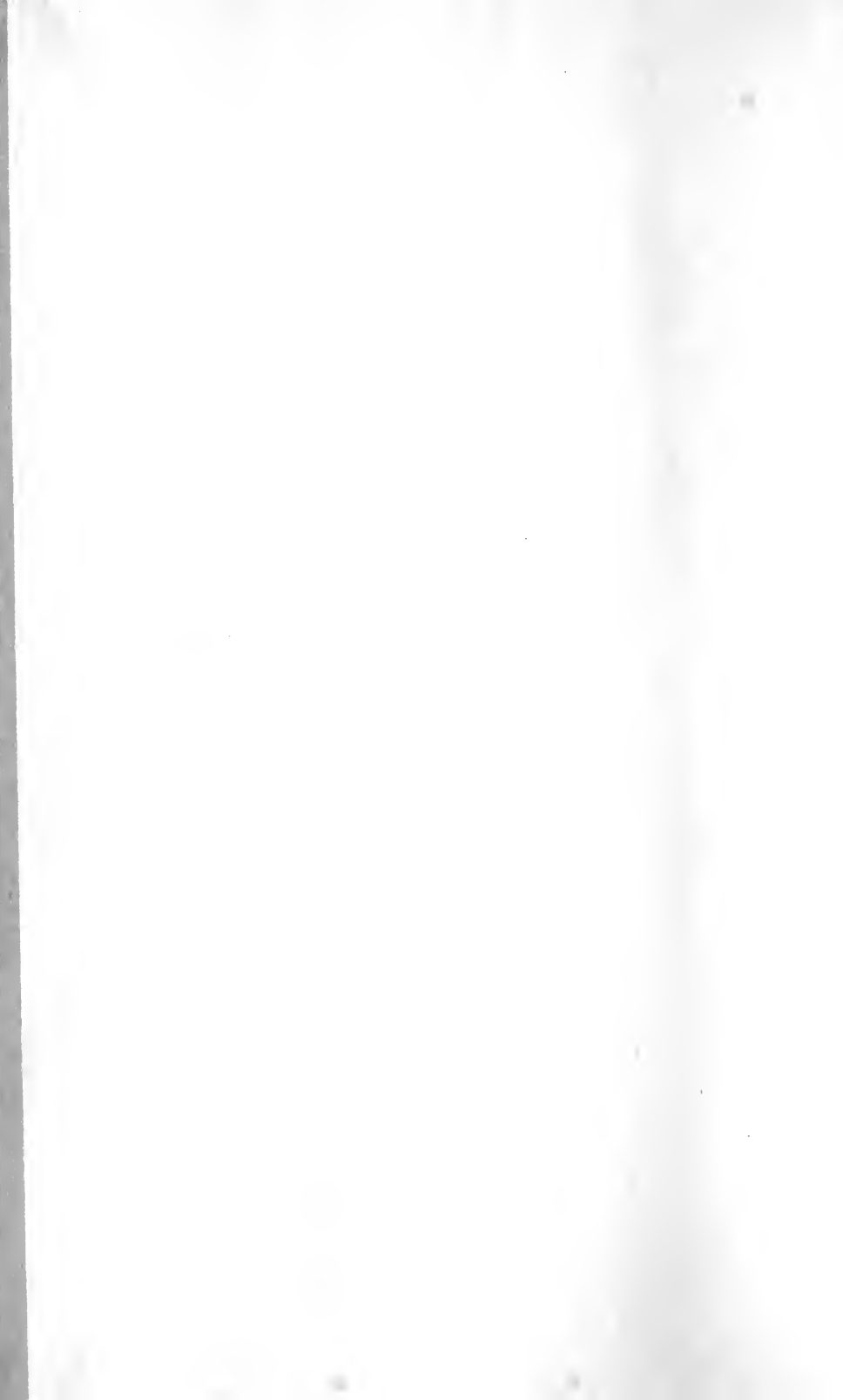
A day or two later we encountered on board, a Belgian woman en route for Illinois, where her daughter was living. She had only sufficient money to pay her passage to New York City, and, being unable to speak the English language, was in great distress. The necessary sum was donated by a Catholic clergyman of Massachusetts, by a Belgian gentleman who was on board, and a lady of the "Committee for the Protection of Travelers." All needful information was given, and when we arrived in New York City she was safely placed on the midnight train for Illinois.

Thus ended a short but fascinating mission among the Belgian refugees in England. Thus ended the troubles, trials and sorrows of three months in "The Great War."

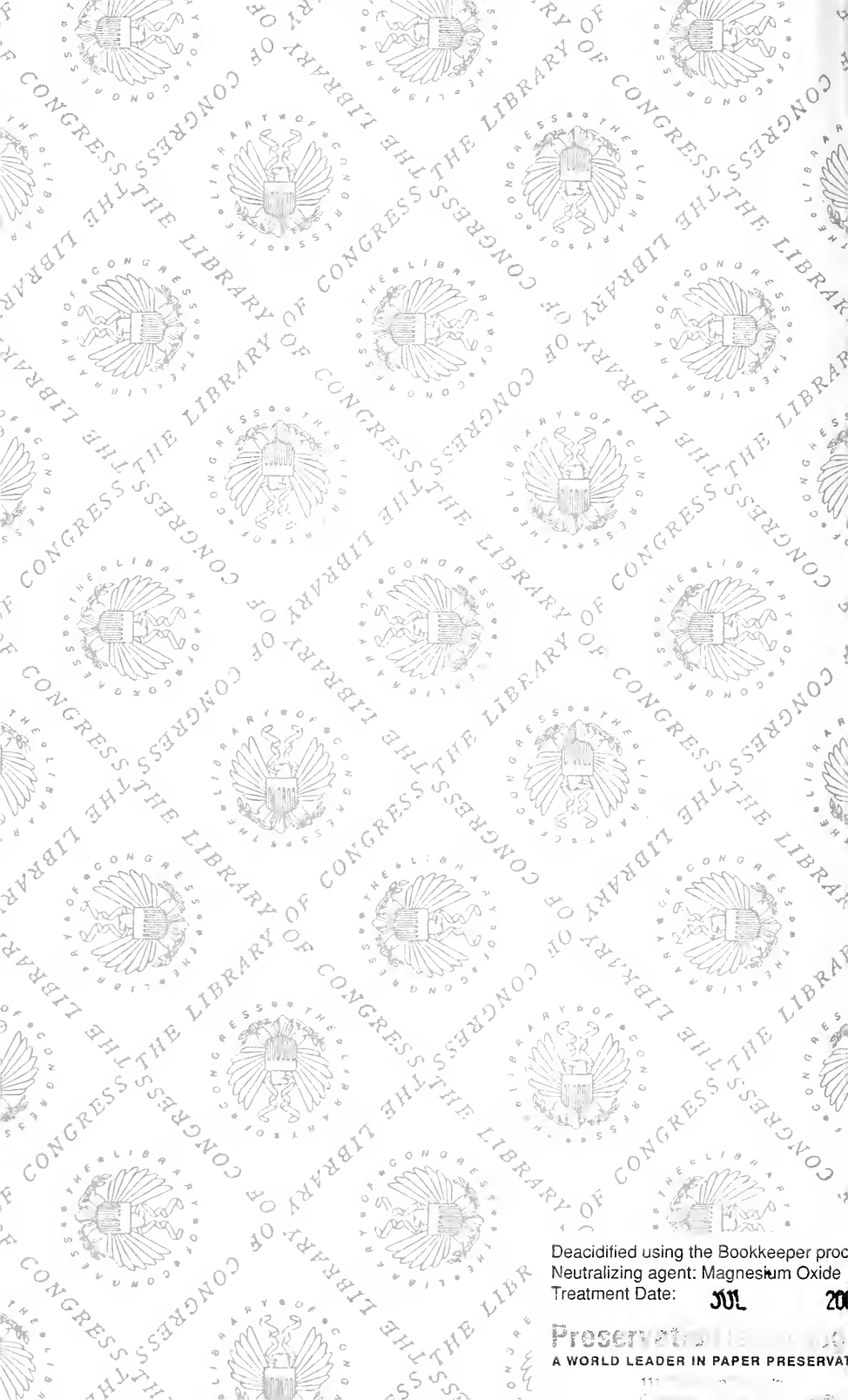
May the gory cloud soon disappear from the eastern skies and never, never darken the gold and azure of our own American horizon.





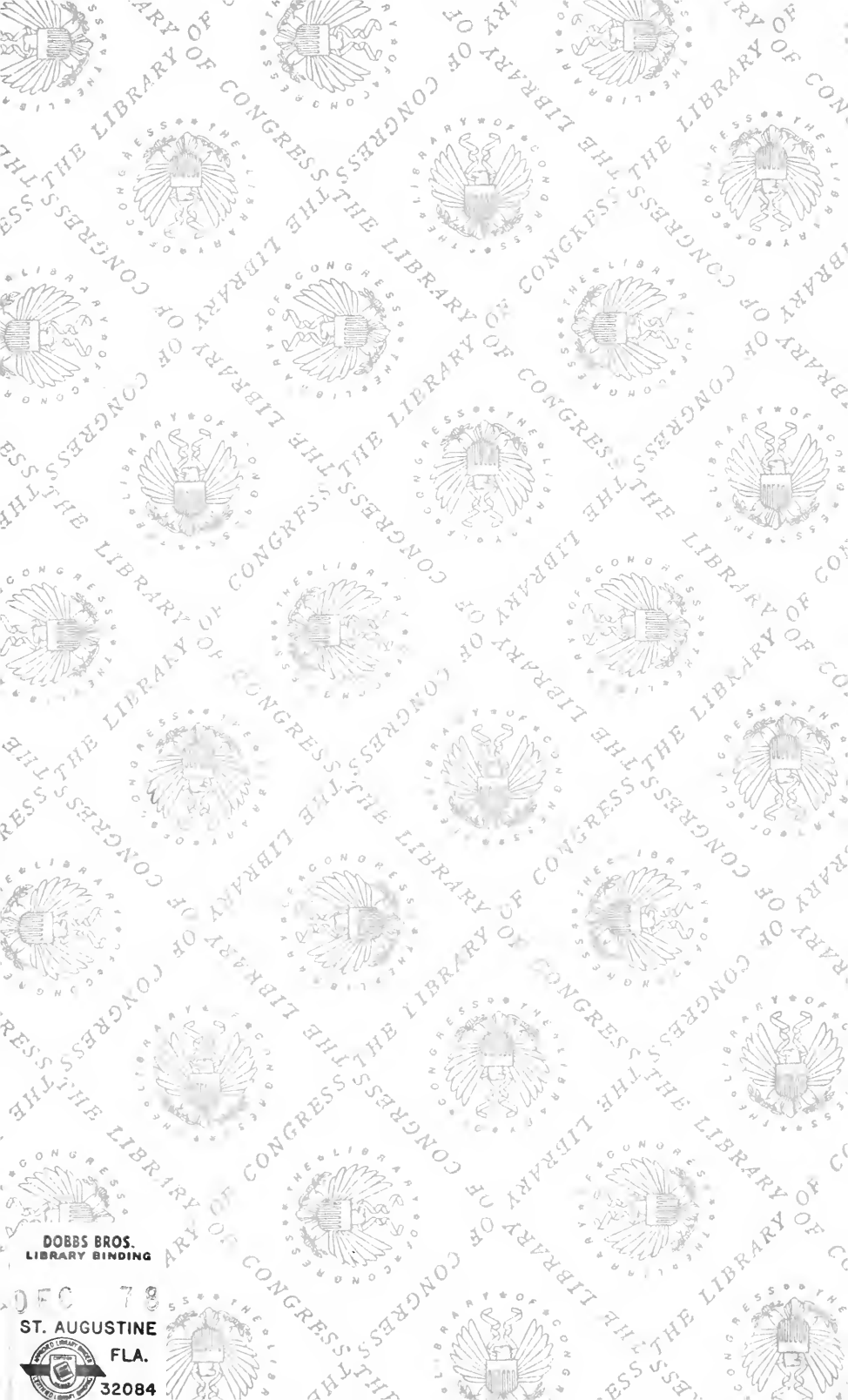






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